Commentary
February 1996

Doom, Gloom, and the Middle Class

Amity Shlaes

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David Gelernter

Leaving the Ghetto
Jacob Katz

Down With Self-Esteem
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As Quebec Goes . . .
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Reading Jurors' Minds
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Whatever Happened to Arthur Rubinstein
Terry Teachout

Books in Review
John Earl Haynes • Marc M. Arkin • Robert S. Wistrich
Christopher Caldwell • Wilfred M. McClay

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Commentary®

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February 1996

Letters from Readers

The National Prospect

To the Editor:

Commentary arrives a little later than usual now that I am living in Siberia; but it is even more of a pleasure to open each issue. Your 50th-anniversary symposium, "The National Prospect" [November 1995], was full of thoughtful if disturbing perspectives. Looking around me at the ruins of Communism, I think continually of the differences between America and Russia, even in its post-Soviet, semi-free state. . . . Tod Lindberg's citation of Yeats's "The Second Coming" ("Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;/ . . . The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity") is even more applicable here, frighteningly so. Why the people who gave overwhelming support to Boris Yeltsin in overthrowing the USSR should, a scant four years later, vote for the Communist party is cause for agonizing reflection.

Could the United States have done more to hasten economic reforms and assure Russians that they could safely and profitably turn to the West once and for all? Have we abandoned the farsightedness that gave rise to the Marshall Plan and American support for a united Europe? Are we so focused on domestic problems . . . that we tacitly endorse isolationism, forgetting the lessons of the 1930's?

Despite such agonizing over current foreign policy—or lack of it—it is very clear from this distance that America remains a country to be proud of, for reasons that have little to do with international policy. On a personal level Russians make warm-hearted, loyal, and unselfish friends, and I have much first-hand evidence to bear this out. But in public, the same Russians are cold, rude, and selfish. Nothing exemplifies this more than going out of one's way to hold a door open for someone struggling with packages and getting not a word of thanks.

The deeply-rooted American sense of fairness and desire to make society better for all . . . can be traced back to Tocqueville's time, and probably before. But are these qualities simply rooted in the "American character," or do they derive from external circumstances that we might hope to reproduce in places like Russia?

I cannot help thinking that there is some economic basis for our sense of community. A strong middle class, possessing the bourgeois values much despised by our liberal elite, appears to be a necessary component of a stable democracy. With property to protect, children to educate, and commercial relationships that depend on giving courtesy and satisfaction to customers, there are strict incentives for the middle class to demand a strong but fair legal system, stable and honest government, and laws that promote market capitalism. . . .

My work here is in health-care reform, as director of quality improvement for a U.S. AID-funded project. Russian physicians are eager to learn from us and excited that we are trying to help. But only a very few understand their society's deep-rooted problems. . . .Those who do understand know that the differences between Russian and American physicians is in their sense of responsibility for others. That this same sense, taken to extremes, has led to most of America's current problems is one of the ironies of our age.

Stanley J. Tillinghast, M.D.
Novosibirsk, Russia

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TO THE EDITOR:

COMMENTARY's 50th: a wonderful, moving, and, for me, troubling issue. Wonderful because these regulars of public intellectual discourse . . . responded to the editors' opening statement with a predictably broad range of opinion that nevertheless has a common and nontrivial core. . . . Moving because of the absence of posturing in so large an assemblage. But troubling, too, because within it there is not one voice of a distinguished natural scientist, or even a historian of science.

There are many ways to interpret this fact, and they come in pairs. For example: eminent scientists do not think much, or deeply, about the national prospect—or they are not equipped to do so. Science has played, and will play, a minor role in the evolution of our culture—or it affects culture but not at the level of individual consciousness. . . .

I consider these and other explanations false. . . . There is no blame to be laid. If there were, it would be at the door of my scientific colleagues, not at COMMENTARY's. Thus is the discussion of science and society abandoned to the New Left relics and young fanatics of the Internet's "SciFraud" list; to the cultural-studies industry; and to the new international body of academic Dadaists—all of whom have large and still-growing influence within that system we misname higher education.

The least of what is missing is serious discussion of the good and evil implicit in the new connectedness of this digital age. The most is the real meaning of our longevity that has doubled over the course of 100 years; of what we now know of the age of the universe and the place of our home planet among the unreachable stars; of what we have learned about how our bodies, including their inheritance, work, and of what difficult things we are clearly about to learn.

PAUL R. GROSS
Molecular Biology Institute
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

COMMENTARY 's 50th-anniversary issue was very impressive, though I was surprised by the editors' opening statement, which reflects a lack of historical perspective. . . . Though a visitor from a homogeneous state might consider America balkanized, a historian would find it far less balkanized now than it was in the past.

In 1945, blacks in the old Confederacy could not even vote. As COMMENTARY prepared its first issue, hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens had been interned for several years only because of their (Japanese) race. . . . Moreover, Americans are less separated today along racial, religious, and ethnic lines than they were in 1945. As some of your contributors point out, intermarriage rates have shot up. Fifty years ago, Catholics (and within the Catholic community, the Irish, Italians, and Poles), Protestants, and Jews seldom ventured to tie the knot outside their own faith. This is not the case any more, and it is also true of marriages between Asian-Americans and white Americans. Even black-white marriages, illegal in many states until the 1960's, are now not uncommon (8 percent of blacks marry non-blacks, and far more do so in the more educated segment of the population). In 1945 Catholics and Jews faced uphill battles to get elected outside their ethnic-religious enclaves whereas today religion is rarely an obstacle to a political career.

There is another aspect of the difference between 1945 and 1995 which COMMENTARY did not note. In 1945, the Western world was under intellectual attack from Marxism. Many professors, journalists, politicians, and clergymen helped Stalin and his successors fight bourgeois democracy. Today, political correctness is to Marxist infiltration what the common-cold virus is to cancer, unpleasant but harmless. There are several reasons for this.

First, political correctness has not captured first-rate intellectuals. Marxism hypnotized some of the century's brightest minds . . . but PC intellectuals are, at best, second-rate thinkers.

Second, Marxism infected the commanding heights of the academy: political science, history, economics, physics, literature, etc. As a result of its separationist instincts, however, PC has self-segregated itself in marginal departments: ethnic studies, gender analysis, and other programs which nobody takes seriously.

Third, the lies of pro-Soviet intellectuals were not obvious to naive Americans. If you were told that the USSR was a wonderful place, it took a certain amount of effort to find out the truth. But if you are taught that marriage is nothing but rape, as a friend of mine at Yale was, all you have to do is look around at your married friends next door. So much of PC runs counter to human evolution that most students are PC-proof.

PC's program of ethnic-awareness presents a problem because of its racism, but its overall impact on American life has been overstated. . . .

ROBERT DUJARRIC
Hudson Institute
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

I very much enjoyed "The National Prospect"—it was your best symposium yet. One of the common themes among the contributors was their abhorrence of multiculturalism, which they claimed was responsible for the balkanization going on around them. The antidote they recommended was the melting pot. I profoundly disagree. . . .

The main glue that held American society together before World War II was not a common culture in the conventional sense of the word. America's cities were divided into ethnic enclaves and people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds rarely formed intimate relationships, let alone marriages. The small towns and rural areas of the country were overwhelmingly composed of white Protestants or black Protestants (in the South). . . . Cultural uniformity

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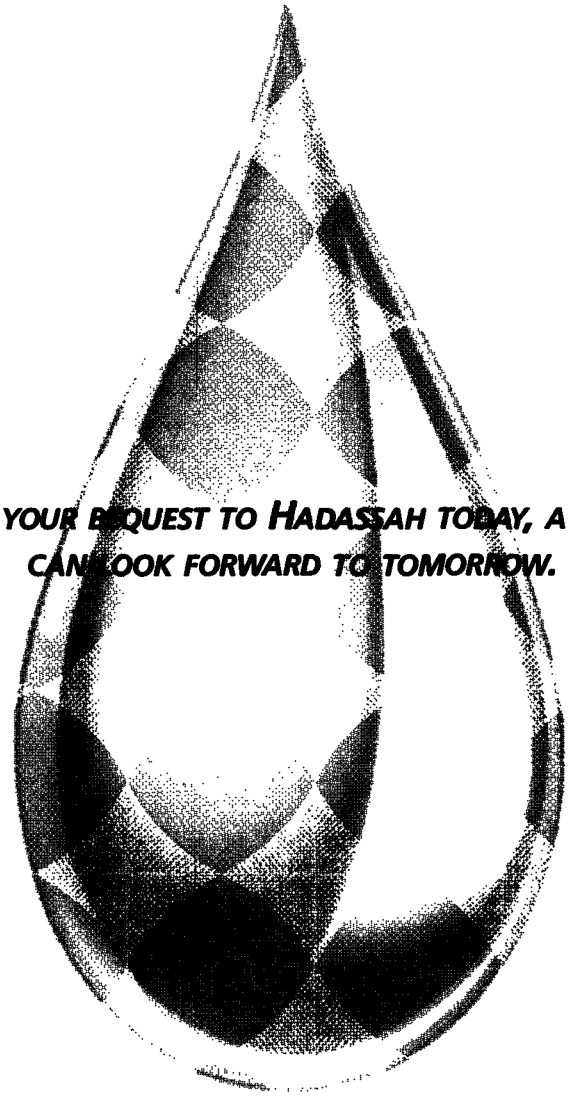
A YOUNG GIRL'S IMMUNE SYSTEM WAS REACTIVATED WITH A DROP OF HER OWN BLOOD THAT HAD BEEN STORED SINCE BIRTH.



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and a sense of specific social norms were imposed on people by the communities in which they lived. . . . This social reality progressively decayed after World War II.

From the 1950's on, the idea of the melting pot was promoted through public schools, suburbanization, higher education, and a nationwide diet of television and pop culture. The result is the American population we see today under the age of fifty: lonely, isolated, living in New Jersey-style suburbs and Beirut-style cities where communal life of any sort is moribund or nonexistent. I grew up in the flourishing Jewish community of Brookline, Massachusetts 30 years ago and have watched the decay of the non-Orthodox part of this community since then. . . .

Balkanization and multiculturalism, even in its barbarized and race-obsessed form, . . . stem from the natural reactions of people who have lost or are in the process of losing their ethnic communities without having them replaced by any nonsectarian form of civil life. . . .

Most Americans do not have rewarding careers: they have jobs they are lucky to keep for more than five years at a stretch. These people need some form of communal life to provide them with a social-support network, especially given the decay of the family noted by Edward N. Luttwak. . . .

A religious revival is probably the only hope for recreating communal life in such a vast and diverse country where pop culture has destroyed authentic culture almost everywhere. But remember, religion in America includes hundreds of Protestant denominations, in addition to Catholics and Mormons. On top of this, there are Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. . . . What is this if not multiculturalism? . . .

ELLEN S. SHNIDMAN
Rochester, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Is our national project unraveling? For it to unravel, one must presuppose that the claims of civilization are pretty weak against the centrifugal forces of culture, and that multiculturalism, Afrocentrism, and various other corrosive movements will prove to have a large constituency outside the hothouse environment of academia. One must suppose that ordinary Americans are either too stupid or too lazy to be persuaded to take corrective action on behalf of the society in which they have a stake. One must suppose the comparative ineffectuality of conservative and centrist intellectuals, journalists, and politicians over the forces of the Left. I see little reason to suppose any of these things. Rather, I see signs of unexpected adaptation within even the sectarian Right, learning to appeal beyond the ranks of believers. (Witness the evolution of the Christian Coalition.) I see conservative politicians like Newt Gingrich outclassing their opponents.

I live in a county in the Washington-Baltimore metropolitan area that gave George Bush a majority of its vote. Parents are actively involved in schools, which remain comparatively free of the more noxious fads. Churches and civic organizations flourish. There is a fair degree of integration, particularly in schools and the workplace. . . . As far as I can see, ordinary Americans are still pretty much worth betting on.

As for the elite—well, there are several elites in our society. The businessmen and military officers I know are pretty conservative, as one might expect. I have met a number of politicians and civic leaders, black and white, at local, state, and federal levels, and even the liberals among them are generally more centrist than leftist. The academics I know are a mixed bunch, of course, but even the socialists among them seem to be fairly conservative culturally. . . . In the media, both the *Washington Post* and the *New Republic*, bellwethers of the liberal "cognitive elite," tend to take a dim view of political correctness, multiculturalism, *et al.* . . . In general, then, the elite seems less benighted than some had feared.

In sum, though the prospects for the full implementation of the conservative agenda might be in doubt, there is every reason to believe that the conservative resurgence that began with Ronald Reagan and has lately swept Congress is emblematic of the broader forces of self-correction within our society. What kind of patriot would have so little faith in our institutions and our people as to despair at this juncture? . . .

MICHAEL DAVID BLUME
Annapolis, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

What a fascinating and densely rich issue. In spite of my own pessimistic bent, I found the optimists the most convincing, in part because of my own experiences in the early 70's. At the time, my husband and I were addicted to reading doom-and-gloom gold bugs full of prognostications of collapsing currency and civilization: hide in the woods; don't hold currency, it's toilet paper; the apocalypse is nigh. Fortunately, the United States, both politically and economically, is extraordinarily resilient, with enormous reserves to buffer mistakes. The subsequent twenty years have been a time of rapid expansion and success. . . .

One issue that was not much discussed in your omnibus of opinion, though, was that of the debasement of the currency, . . . which has, historically, destroyed morality and social stability, fostered corruption, and led to decline in a civilization. It happened in France in the 1700's; attended the fall of Rome; made Germans more vulnerable to a lunatic like Hitler; etc. . . .

In not considering the devaluing of the currency, perhaps we are overlooking a source of disruption with consequences as profound as any mentioned in the symposium. . . .

One of the things America had in the "golden" 50's was a stable currency. I do not think gold is necessarily the answer, but depending on the self-restraint of politicians has historically been disappointing.

Fabulous work, thank

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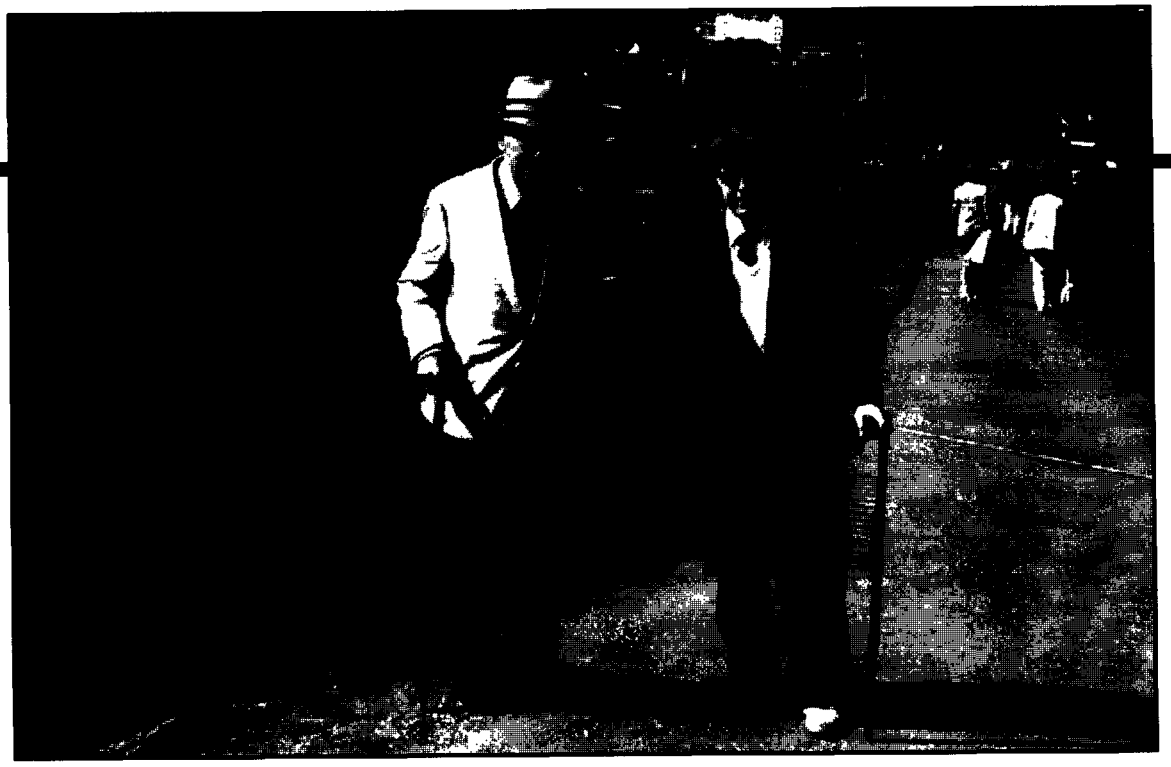

About those walking sticks...

On the left walking stick leans the Nobel laureate in literature, Isaac Bashevis Singer, the great Yiddish writer for the Jewish Forward. On the right one leans Seth Lipsky, who was then a member of the editorial board of the Wall Street Journal and who aspired to bring out the Forward in English. The date was August 1984. The editor had travelled to Mr. Singer's vacation spot at the Swiss Alpine village of Wengen to seek Mr. Singer's wisdom and support. They decided to take a walk. Mr. Lipsky suspected it might be the most important walk he ever took. So he slipped an instant camera into his pocket. Then they picked up those walking sticks from a barrel in the hotel lobby and set out.

The walk lasted hours. Mr. Singer talked of the Talmud and Mark Twain and of his love of the Yiddish language. They shared their appreciation of humor and irony. They talked of the crisis in Jewish continuity. Finally Mr. Lipsky poured out his hopes for bringing the Forward out in English for a new generation of American Jews. As they were headed down the mountain, Mr. Lipsky reached into his pocket, retrieved the camera and passed it to a tourist strolling in the other direction. Mr. Lipsky took Mr. Singer by the arm and said, "Mr. Singer, please turn around." The great writer turned and looked back toward the mountains. Click. The shutter sealed the moment. Then Mr. Singer leaned over to his young visitor and told him that if he was going to become editor of the Forward he would have to remember, when he was getting his picture taken, to remove his sun glasses.

Today, the Forward is celebrating its fifth anniversary in English and is one of the fastest growing newspapers in America. "Just as Jews remade themselves from immigrants to Americans over the last 100 years," writes the Los Angeles Times, "the Forward that everyone read in Yiddish at the beginning of this century has transformed itself into the Forward that increasing numbers of Jews are reading in English at the end of this century." Send us the coupon below, and we will send you a trial subscription of four weekly issues of the Forward *absolutely free*. Then we'll send you a bill. If you do not wish to continue, simply write "cancel" on the bill and send it back. There will be no charge and no obligation. If you'd like to continue, just pay the bill of $34.46, and we'll send you an additional 52 weekly issues of the Forward. Incidentally, the walking sticks are back at the hotel. But if you would like a souvenir from Wengen, we'll be glad to send you a handsome reproduction of the photo to welcome you to the Forward family.

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you for a stimulating and informative experience. I raise a glass to your next 50 years.

ANN BLUMENTHAL
Buellton, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I was dazzled by the array of *fin-de-siècle* opinions in your November issue from some of the wisest thinkers the nation has to offer. I would characterize them in general as combining pessimism over the present cultural drift of American society with a conviction that renewal will come, if at all, from a return to our religious heritage. Yet for all the affirmation of religious and moral values, the answers to the editors' questions are strikingly secular. Even conservative spokesmen appear to have lost the way or the will to speak of God in public. Furthermore, contemporary prognosticators seem to lack a biblical framework to evaluate current history. How can one talk about the future in the Judeo-Christian tradition without beginning with the assumption that God is the author of history, or, to put it more pointedly, that history is the record of His judgments?

Biblical history, it seems to me, offers two relevant paradigms for our time in the reigns of King Hezekiah and King Josiah in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. The Second Book of Kings describes how the northern kingdom of Israel had so thoroughly corrupted itself that the Lord "removed it out of His sight" by the hand of the Assyrian empire. The southern kingdom also sinned, but through the reforms of Hezekiah, coupled with his personal repentance and faith, God deferred its end for more than a century.

Hezekiah's reforms were undone by his successor, Manasseh, whose multicultural agenda included worship of fertility gods and goddesses, witchcraft, and child sacrifice. After 55 years on the throne, Manasseh "slept with his fathers," i.e., died in bed. Shortly thereafter his grandson Josiah began to reign. Josiah carried out the most thorough reform in the history of the kingdom, but it was cut short by his tragic death in battle. Enter the Babylonians, stage right. The reforms of King Josiah . . . were washed away in the tide of God's stored-up anger at the sins of Manasseh.

Do we live in the age of Hezekiah, or of Josiah? Is there still time for national repentance and restoration, or are we at present living out the inexorable wrath of God? . . .

STEPHEN NOLL
Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry
Ambridge, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . The symposium was evidently intended to stimulate discussion on the Republican revolution. . . . Several contributors raised the specter of balkanization, including Arch Puddington, who said that the racial policies of the preceding decades were crucial in "delegitimizing the American concept of government as servant of all the people."

These pessimistic views were shared by other contributors. Norman Podhoretz, however, dissented, citing his confidence in "the political stability and economic strength of the country." Zbigniew Brzezinski also said that he could not accept the "apocalyptic vision as the inevitable future for the United States."

I too am optimistic, but I find it difficult to maintain my optimism when confronted by the fact that, as Mr. Puddington notes, Louis Farrakhan. . . , who calls for the separation of the races, has perhaps the largest following of any leader in the black community. . . .

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And, arguing again on the side of the pessimists, it might be useful to recall the fate of other multiethnic conglomerate empires. . . . We have witnessed the fall . . . of the Ottoman empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire, the British, French, Spanish, Portuguese empires, and, more recently, the end of the Thousand Year Reich and the Soviet Union. . . .

Are we next? . . .

SAMUEL L. TENNENBAUM
West Orange, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Among all the thoughtful contributions to your 50th-anniversary issue, not one focused on what seems to me by far the strongest anti-democratic force in America, particularly on university campuses. That is, of course, radical feminism. Not feminism as it should have been, as men and women of good will hoped it would become, a genuine freeing and strengthening of women in society, but feminism as it turned out: crabbed, envious, sunk in endless rage, scapegoating, hypersensitive, paranoid, and profoundly anti-democratic. . . . The vicious gender war we have seen in the last few decades may go on for many more years unless the center can take hold again. . . .

Will this situation ever change? The record is not hopeful. . . . The Soviet Union fell less from outside pressure than from the weight of its own absurdity, and it was the grandchildren of the Revolution who saw its nakedness most clearly and pitilessly. But how many decades will it take before reality comes home to the de-gendered? . . .

JOSEPH D. BERCZ
Berkeley, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I believe a fair consensus of your contributors' comments would be that our "liberals" have made quite a mess of things these last 30 years. And to think, they did it all on borrowed money.

I thoroughly enjoyed the symposium: please have more in this critical election year.

JAMES MCCAFFERTY
Blaine, Washington

TO THE EDITOR:

I am a high-school librarian—I have read COMMENTARY for ten years. Every issue is a gem, but the November issue is a brilliant jewel—every essay an intellectual treat.

GITA RAYMER
Huntington Woods
Michigan

TO THE EDITOR:

I could not imagine a worse format than the one you chose for the 50th-anniversary issue of COMMENTARY. I shuddered to think of what horrors of banality and pontification awaited me when I opened the issue, so I put it away until I felt stronger, or, at least, had some strong drink to dull the anticipated assault on my senses.

Now, 72 essays later and cold sober, I congratulate you and the essayists. Sure, there is banality and pontification, but not much. Instead, there is sharp disagreement: immigration is and is not the cause of our problems; politics is and is not a solution; morality can and cannot be fostered; etc. Much good sense, some good worry, and a pervading spirit of strength and hope and good will.

Bless you, each and every one.

EDWIN T. HAEFELE
Alliance, Nebraska

China Policy

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur Waldron ["Deterring China," October 1995] is to be congratulat-

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ed for being right on target in his evaluation of our China policies; they seem to be locked in place and our policy-makers are not sufficiently aware of the changes that have taken place sine the 1970's. We must always be sensitive to the feelings of the Chinese, but we must never permit the leaders in Beijing to determine American policy. We should not in any way apologize for allowing Lee Teng-hui, the president of Taiwan, to make a private visit to this country to receive an honorary degree. Many of President Clinton's foreign-policy advisers are the same people who were critical of President Reagan and his "hard line" toward the former Soviet Union. The refusal of President Clinton to meet with the Dalai Lama in a setting appropriate for a religious leader of millions of people brings to mind the refusal of President Ford to meet with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn because of fears that such a meeting would undermine the policy of détente.

What is absolutely imperative is the need, as Mr. Waldron points out, to rethink our policies vis-à-vis Taiwan. It has now been separated from mainland China for about 100 years. Leaders in the United States, Japan, and other Asian nations must nudge China into recognizing what has been a reality for a long time. As a nation-state, Taiwan is much more viable than many nations that are now members of the UN. We probably have to wait until the passing of Deng Xiaoping, but we should be preparing, in cooperation with our Asian allies, to go down the road toward formal diplomatic recognition.

A prosperous, democratic Taiwan could become a model and a beacon that influences mainland China in the same way that the freedom and prosperity of West Berlin influenced the nations in Eastern Europe subjugated by the Soviet Union.

KENNETH L. HILL
La Salle University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

Since initiating economic reforms in 1979, China has become more open, more pluralistic, and more aware of the outside world. The recent hard-line stance on domestic and international issues is a reflection of internal political dynamics, not a new policy, as Arthur Waldron implies in his article. With Deng passing from the scene, no one in the ruling hierarchy can afford to appear "soft" lest he give his opponents an edge. In fact, the atmosphere in China today is similar to what occurred in the year before Mao's death, when extreme leftist elements held sway. . . .

On the issue of Taiwan, Mr. Waldron is long on raising questions but short on suggesting solutions. China reacted strongly to the private visit of President Lee Teng-hui to the U.S. This reaction was triggered in part by the State Department's reneging on its earlier promise to the Chinese Foreign Minister that Lee would not be allowed to come to the U.S. In the eyes of the Chinese leaders, Lee's visit showed that American policy lacked consistency, which they interpret as a lack of sincerity. In fact, it was subsequently reported that China's President and Foreign Minister had to apologize to other government officials, especially to the military hard-liners, for having put too much trust in the U.S. . . .

At this point the U.S. has some serious thinking to do on the question of Taiwan. What leverage does it actually have in moving China to a peaceful resolution of the issue? It may need to coordinate its efforts with other Asian countries which also do not want to see a military conflict between China and Taiwan. If Taiwan were attacked by China, would the U.S. get involved? How and to what extent? . . . It may be wise for the U.S. to deal with this problem as it happens and not reveal its hand too early. . . . Still, there are a few things it can do.

First, it should continue to supply defensive weapons to Taiwan in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, but it should not side with the movement for Taiwanese independence. . . .

Second, it should encourage China and Taiwan to expand their unofficial bilateral talks to official levels. . . . It should also stress to China the need for the people of Taiwan to achieve political representation in the international community before eventual reunification with the mainland, as well as the importance of a peaceful reunification process. . . .

Despite occasional setbacks, a market economy will, in time, lead to desirable political changes. China's economic reforms and its open-door policy, coupled with the introduction of information technology, have brought about a more open society than existed in the past. Indeed, in many respects the current reform effort in China has exceeded what the pro-democracy student movement called for in 1989.

All in all, then, I see little reason for the U.S. to adopt a new policy of deterring China at a time when a post-Deng regime might push it farther along the road to becoming a more open and capitalistic society. This in turn would tend to lessen the likelihood of China's engaging in any rash military action.

MICHAEL TANG
New York City

ARTHUR WALDRON writes:

I am glad to see that although Kenneth L. Hill and Michael Tang disagree between themselves about Taiwan's future political form, they agree with me that its current marginal status is unsustainable. Neither correspondent, however, addresses my core concern, which was the need to deter China from its current experimentation with the use of force. Since the article was written, Beijing has begun whispering that forceful measures—such as blockade or precision air strikes—may be used against Taiwan as early as this spring, after the March presidential election. That may be bluster, but we cannot bank on it: continuing military exercises, such as the one near Taiwan in November 1995 that included ad-

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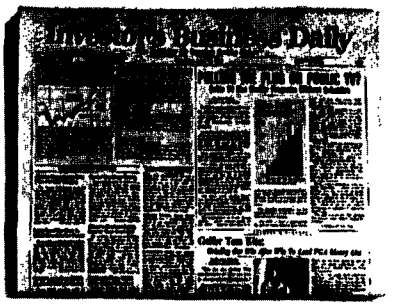

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vanced Su-27 fighters, suggest some seriousness of purpose. These developments only strengthen my conviction that we must take the threat from China seriously and move to deter it. I would suggest some straight talking by our embassy in Beijing, and regular dispatching of ships and aircraft to observe China's military exercises—coupled, of course, with clear indications of how favorably Chinese-American relations can develop once force is abandoned.

Academic Advocates

TO THE EDITOR:

There can be no doubt. Gertrude Himmelfarb ["Academic Advocates," September 1995] does not like postmodernists, deconstructionists, political advocates, or those who get personal in the college classroom. She has made this plain in so many words and in so many venues. There are many of us in the academy who can and do find these points of view troublesome, but whether the integrity of the university is threatened by their existence is entirely unclear. What is a bit clearer, at least to this writer, is that the tone and approach of Miss Himmelfarb belie the very thing of which she complains. How is it possible to deny any value to these positions unless one has a lock on the "truth" from the outset? (Whatever happened to good old American pragmatism and its hard-headed approach to the idea of "truth"?) It is true that there is nothing more unnerving than having to listen to someone speak what seems to be utter nonsense. Unfortunately, the wisdom of the present very often was the raving of the past.

I sympathize with Miss Himmelfarb's desire to set out a kind of canon of correct thinking, but how do we begin to construct such a canon? She would reply that there are some things which are beyond discussion. If I understand her position correctly, she has conceptualized the character of the university in a way that would contradict the very ground upon which she bases her argument. She states that we need an "ideal—of truth, or objectivity, or disinterested knowledge" in order to judge scholarly merit. As a sociologist, I would reply that there is an interest at stake in the development and distribution of all knowledge. We must make a case for the superiority of our interests. Some of us ground the superiority of our interests in the finer consequences which result from the success of those interests. Others base their belief on their faith, be it religious or philosophical. Whatever the basis or the grounding, no individual's interests are *per se* superior simply because such a claim is made.

Compared with Miss Himmelfarb's uncompromising "objectivity," the medieval doctrine of knowledge through faith and reason taught by the Church seems downright open-minded. . . .

MARVIN PROSONO
Southwest Missouri State University
Springfield, Missouri

TO THE EDITOR

. . . Gertrude Himmelfarb distinguishes between a professor who engages in the "scholarly pursuit of truth within the university" (a phenomenon which, she argues, increasingly belongs to the past) and one who "expresses his political views within the classroom, without regard for either scholarship or truth." This is indeed a justified criticism, but it seems to me that Miss Himmelfarb misses the most astoundingly ridiculous aspect of postmodernism: its blatant hypocrisy. Postmodernists claim that truth is an outmoded concept while in the same breath they expound their trendy-Left causes. The logical question then becomes: if there is no truth, . . . why should we believe in the things they advocate? . . .

So many in the politically-correct movements of the day would have it that those who disagree with them are hateful and intolerant. Well, as one such hatemonger, I frankly am intolerant of ideas that I find intellectually and morally unsound, and this certainly includes the ideas of deconstructionists, feminists, postmodernists, multiculturalists, *et al.* I admit my lack of tolerance for such points of view. The above-mentioned groups feel the same way about my opinions, but the difference is, they do not admit it. . . .

ANDY NOWICKI
Atlanta, Georgia

TO THE EDITOR:

Gertrude Himmelfarb's persuasive article, "Academic Advocates," goes to the heart of what ruined the humanities at well-known universities like Stanford. . . .

Any teaching, e.g., multiculturalism, that begins by abandoning the very idea of and quest for harmony is doomed from the beginning. Even politically righteous and gullible students today are often bored with the shallow, dutifully "correct," and tasteless ideological fare they have been given. So at Stanford the humanities, the traditional core of the university, . . . are rapidly disappearing. Almost all that is left in the humanities is an obscene, politically-obedient façade. . . . What mostly remains in the university at large is a cold, dehumanized machine of social engineering, brittle legalism, illiberalism, technology, and careerism. . . .

ROBERT GREER COHN
Stanford University
Stanford, California

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB writes:

In reply to Marvin Prosono: one does not need to have a "lock on the 'truth'" in order to criticize those tendencies that sanction political advocacy in the classroom. One does, however, need to have a sufficient respect for truth (truth without quotation marks)—the truth that scholars aspire to, knowing that it always eludes them.

There is a world of difference between "good old American pragmatism," which subjects any claim to truth to the "hard-headed" test of reason, logic, and evidence, and the absolute relativism and subjectivism of postmodernism, which denies not

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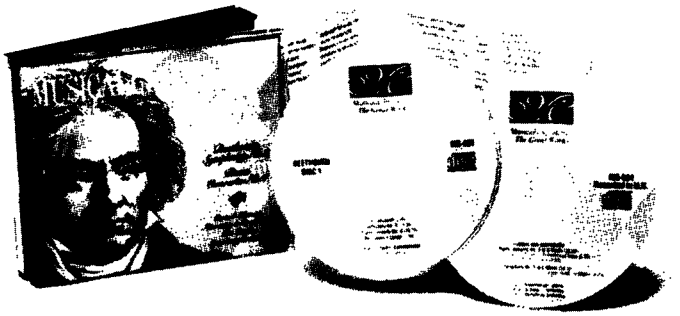

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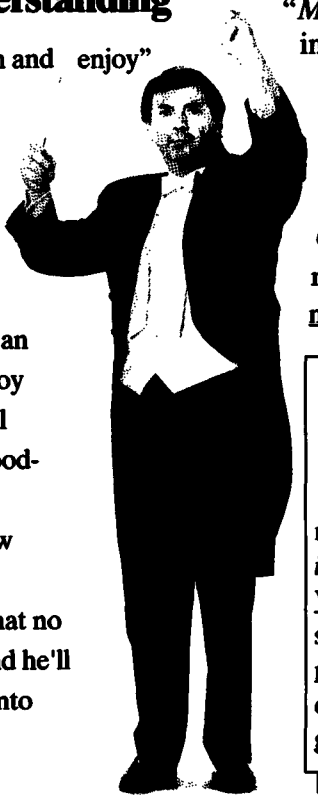

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only truth but reason, logic, evidence, and reality itself. It is precisely the demeaning of knowledge—the idea that the quest for knowledge is nothing more, as Mr. Prosono sees it, than a reflection of one's "interests"—that permits political advocacy to flourish in the university.

Stokowski

TO THE EDITOR:

Reading Terry Teachout's article on Leopold Stokowski ["The Vulgar Virtuoso," October 1995], I . . . wondered if he were of an age that would qualify him to undertake an analysis of one of America's greatest musicians. I, in my eightieth year, having associated with Stokowski in the 30's, find it difficult to accept the ill-considered language Mr. Teachout slings at the artist, as, for example, when he says that "Stokowski today remains a symbol of unseriousness—[a] man who spouted platitudes about music in a phony continental accent." It is true that "Stokie," as we called him, affected a phony British/Slavic accent. But one must consider the era in which this great talent emerged. . . . In those days the only musicians considered to be worth anything were ones who had been nurtured in Europe. So "Stokie" programmed his personality to suit the times and, with a few notable exceptions, many never forgave him his stunning personality or his success. . . .

As a musician, Stokie was a researcher, an experimenter, a tester, one who took advantage of new scientific phenomena to try to enlarge musical taste and horizons. He forced his staid Philadelphia audiences to endure many new works which they found unpalatable. And he endured boos, seat-banging, and people running out of the Academy until he finally was forced to bow to their pressure. But he gave opportunities to new composers and new performers. . . . He sought out unknown talent—I myself was plucked out of a choral performance to sing a small solo in the orchestra's performance of a Richard Strauss motet.

Frequently he went up to the amphitheater in the Academy where we all sat in our 50-cent student seats to get a better feeling of the orchestra's balance and tone.

His musical wisdom predated by decades the public's change in taste and I believe he had a good deal to do with fostering that change. The great architectural cathedral of Bach's organ music became in his understanding the stuff of human passion; in his orchestral transcription a simple G-Minor fugue became more than a contrapuntal exercise—it was a human conversation with oboist, flutist, and trumpeter speaking to one another . . . and building to a climax of feeling. His Beethoven's Ninth explained to the audience all the human emotions that abounded in that work of genius. . . . He drew the Philadelphia Orchestra audiences to new levels of musical experience. . . .

Of course, he was sometimes irritating. For example, this is how he stopped the audience from coughing, coming in late, and running out early to catch the Main Line train. . . . Stokie had the musicians stroll in one by one, meander around, talk, cough, and, toward the end of the program, get up singly and walk out while he continued conducting to an empty stage.

He put on outrageous events to get children to come to the Saturday children's concerts. He brought baby elephants on stage while the orches-

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tra played Saint-Saens's "Carnival of the Animals." . . . None of those squealing kids ever forgot those concerts.

Leopold Stokowski built a generation of music lovers and he built the magnificent lush, rich Philadelphia sound, . . . which continued throughout the Eugene Ormandy years and changed only with Ricardo Muti's tenure. . . .

REBECCA S. HUROWITZ
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

I am always glad to hear from people who had personal dealings with the endlessly interesting Leopold Stokowski. But needless to say, or so I thought, my piece was written in praise of Stokowski. The "ill-considered language" Rebecca Hurowitz cites in her first paragraph was intended merely to summarize the received critical view of Stokowski as charlatan; the remainder of the piece explained why that view is false, and why her view of Stokowski is for the most part correct.

Isaac Babel

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert Alter's thoughtful essay on Jewish writers, "The Jewish Voice" [October 1995], needs one correction, and, perhaps, an emendation.

First, the correction. Isaac Babel never made it to the gulag, nor did he live until 1941. He was shot in the basement of the Lubyanka prison on January 27, 1940. This information, together with transcripts of his interrogations, was unearthed by the Russian lawyer Arkady Vaksberg in 1988, and appears in English in Vaksberg's book, *Stalin's Prosecutor*.

Second, to say that Babel's "poised ambivalence would cause him political grief," including, by implication, his arrest and death, is not quite fair. Babel suffered one serious attack occasioned by his writing. The leader of the charge was the commander of the First Cavalry, Semyon Budyonny, who read in Babel's subtle prose a blunt slander of his heroic troops. Maxim Gorky, who was still alive at that point, defended Babel, and the affair blew over.

While Babel's comparative silence and personal suffering of the late 30's certainly resulted from his understanding of political matters, he remained a famous and well-off writer who was allowed several trips abroad. His arrest in 1939 was related only tenuously to his work. More to the point were the peculiarities of his life, for Babel's dark side included a kind of political voyeurism that drew him perilously close to the centers of power.

Babel knew Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the NKVD and architect of the Terror; he was an old friend of Yezhov's wife, who was a fellow Jew from Odessa, and frequented their home. When Yezhov fell from power, Babel's fate was sealed.

ALICE NAKHIMOVSKY
Colgate University
Hamilton, New York

ROBERT ALTER writes:

Some of my information about Babel was clearly out of date, and I thank Alice Nakhimovsky for her correction.

The Lost Transport

TO THE EDITOR:

I found "The Lost Transport" by Joseph A. Polak [September 1995] intellectually brilliant and unbearably moving. Its power comes from the fact the Rabbi Polak does not embellish his story but describes only what happened to him on the last train out of Bergen-Belsen in 1945—and his prayers are direct and simple and to the point. . . .

LEROY S. ROUNER
Center Sandwich
New Hampshire

TO THE EDITOR:

I was both grieved and moved by "The Lost Transport"; its images were poignant and memorable: the concentration-camp-on-wheels hurtling eastward; the child-survivor's inner struggle to validate his own memories; the unexpected, simple humanity of the people of Troebitz. Rabbi Polak evoked the horror and sadness of the Holocaust while at the same time inspiring the reader to reflect on the meaning of God's silence. Perhaps, as he says, it is mankind's role not to answer silence with silence but to fill the void with prayer, with tears, with protest. . . .

JILL BAKER SHAMES
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

Joseph A. Polak's "The Lost Transport" was magnificent: rarely have I been so moved by the printed word. The article was the basis for my sermon on the Sabbath before Rosh Hashanah; it evoked an enormous spiritual and emotional response.

[RABBI] BEREL WEIN
Yeshiva Shaarei Torah
Suffern, New York

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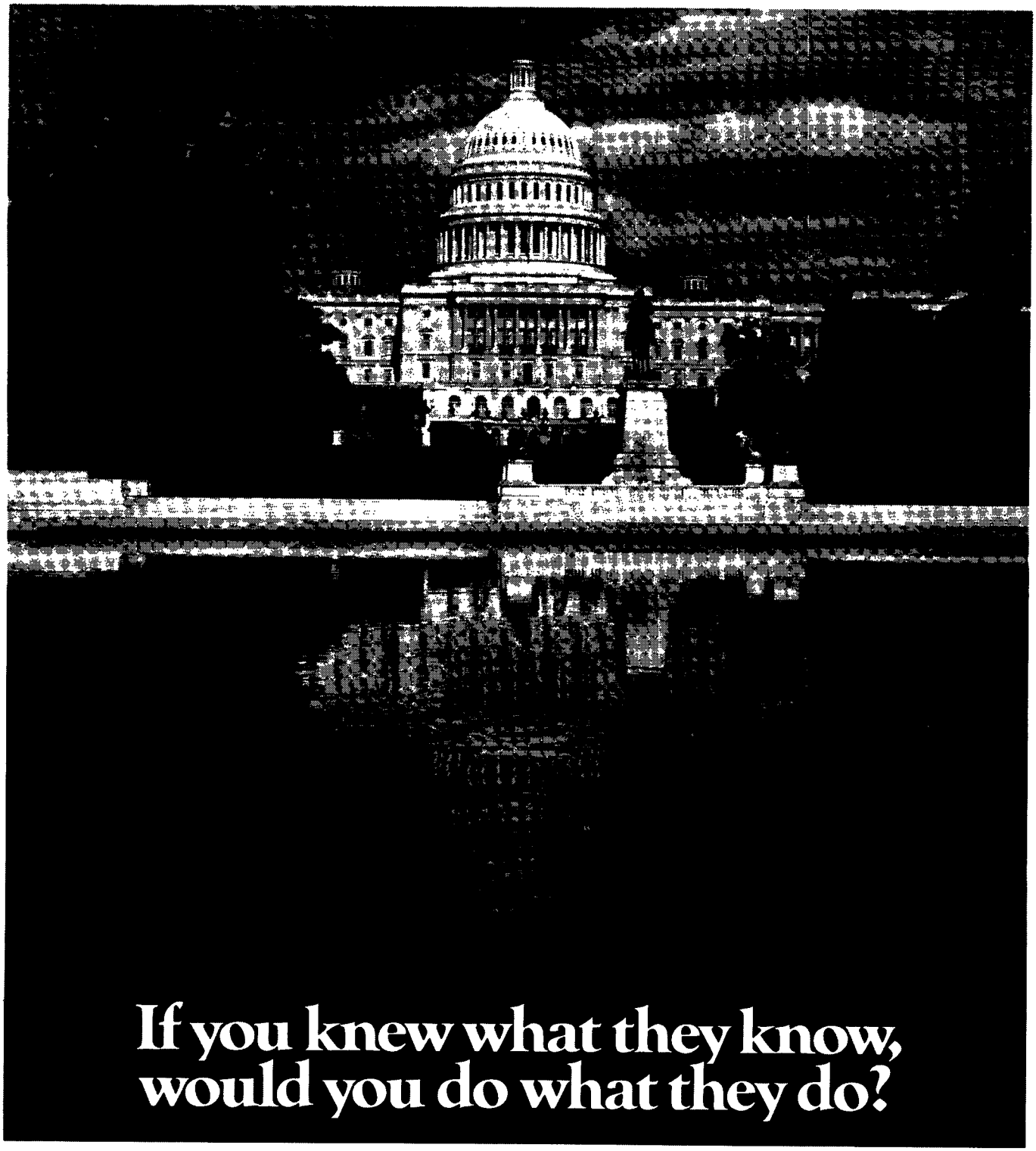

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Commentary
February 1996

Doom, Gloom, and the Middle Class

Amity Shlaes

The test of a good liberal is . . . that he never yields on issues favoring the wealthy.
—John Kenneth Galbraith
The Affluent Society

Four years ago, in the wake of a recession, Bill Clinton campaigned against George Bush by claiming that Republican policies were turning us into a society split between rich and poor, a society whose middle class, reeling from the depredations of the "greed decade," was sinking into ever greater economic trouble. So compelling was the argument that, between the Democrat Bill Clinton and the overtly protectionist Ross Perot, George Bush ended up losing the presidency over the issue of "the economy, stupid" in the very months in which the American economy was growing at its fastest rate in nearly a decade.

Three years into a Democratic administration, the American divide seems only to have widened—or so we are constantly being told, especially by Democrats bent on more sweeping redistributive measures and on halting the conservative political tide. Despite a tax hike, the rich are still raking it in, and much of the middle class feels it cannot get ahead. In December 1995, weeks after the Dow Jones average broke through the 5,000 mark, new figures were released showing the smallest annual increase in workers' earnings on record. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich promptly produced an analysis nearly identical to the one he and Clinton had offered in attacking the Bush administration in 1992. America, he said, is becoming a society of "winners and losers," a society characterized by "rising profits, rising productivity, and a soaring stock market but employee compensation heading nowhere."

The Secretary's lament has been widely echoed in what has become a litany of middle-class woe. Why is it, we are asked, that Americans can no longer afford new cars every year or every few years, cannot afford health insurance, cannot afford to save, to send their children to college, or even to shop at Christmas? Now, just in time for this year's presidential primaries, a fresh spate of books has arrived to buttress these and similar complaints about growing inequality and America's shrinking economic pie. I have selected four of them to survey here. All four are couched in refreshingly untechnical language—there is nothing here about Gini coefficients, Lorenz curves, or any of the other arcane terms beloved of labor economists. In one way or another, each of the four also seeks to recall or perhaps even to succeed an earlier, landmark work devoted to the issue of inequality in America, John Kenneth Galbraith's 1958 best-seller, *The Age of Affluence*.

Amity Shlaes, *a member of the editorial board of the* Wall Street Journal, *writes frequently on economics.*

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II

OF THE four, *The End of Affluence* by Jeffrey Madrick,* a financial journalist, offers the most straightforward account of the disappearing American Dream. The play on Galbraith in the book's title is intentional. Where Galbraith chronicled our postwar life at its apogee, Madrick means to mark its decline, and where Galbraith deplored the disparity between the wealthy and those living in what he called "public squalor," Madrick informs us mournfully that the middle class, once happy to occupy a comfortable seat on the American 50-yard line, is now rapidly joining the poor in their squalor.

The problem, according to Madrick, is that since 1973 our economy has ceased to expand dramatically: "Like the clock that loses a second an hour, the American economy has lost ground so gradually over the past twenty years that we don't realize how far behind we have fallen." He reckons the losses over the years as equivalent to a $12-trillion shortfall, enough to have subsidized President Clinton's dream of linking every child to the Internet several times over, or, in Madrick's own example, "more than enough to have bought each of America's homeowners a new house." He embellishes his case with some unconventional charts, including a quite astounding one that employs tricks with averages to make things look as if the annual growth rate of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined in a straight diagonal line from 1973 to 1994. (In reality, growth rates hopped up and down quite a bit during those years, which included the longest uninterrupted expansion in our postwar history.)

Capturing much of the blame here is our failure to practice industrial policy. The reason the Swiss and the Little Tigers of Asia now sell the world's watches, Madrick writes, is that we have ceased to fund the kind of research that yields products for private industry. Our addiction to free trade is also named by him as a culprit in the decline of manufacturing jobs, in the fact that our trade deficit with China alone stands at almost $30 billion, and in the lamentable circumstance that "many countries now share . . . the advantageous economic environment that we once had to ourselves."

In short, we are being supplanted. *The End of Affluence* is suffused by an elegiac tone, reflected even in chapter titles which move from the immediate postwar period ("What We Had") to the gloom of recent years ("What We Lost") to the even gloomier future ("What We Face"). There is no clear-cut solution here. America, alas, has become too small to grow at a rate that would make our social problems "manageable," and so our only choice is to go the way of Western Europe, namely, the way of redistribution.

Given what high-tax regimes and widening social-welfare schemes have recently brought upon Sweden, Germany, and (most dramatically) France, this may seem an odd recommendation. Madrick justifies it by assuring us that "to this day, our tax rates are the lowest among advanced nations," and so there is plenty of room for raising them as we become "accustomed to making the kind of collective financial sacrifices appropriate to our newly reduced circumstances."

IF THE message of *The End of Affluence* is that we have not grown enough to extricate ourselves from our difficulties, the lesson of a second recent book, *America Unequal* by Sheldon Danziger and Peter Gottschalk,† is that even growing would not help us. According to the authors, "economic, demographic, and policy changes have rendered obsolete the view that economic growth is the major factor determining how many people are rich and how many poor." Inequality is everywhere—"the gaps between the incomes of the rich and the poor and between those of the rich and the middle class have been expanding"—and not even old-fashioned remedies (also known as the "popular view that anyone who works hard can get ahead in America") can cure the disease.

Danziger and Gottschalk are even more direct than Madrick in locating the source of our troubles in Ronald Reagan. He it was who made the old Great Society programs into the "primary targets of . . . budget retrenchment." (*America Unequal* does acknowledge that the size of many Great Society programs actually *increased* in the Reagan era, but, having so acknowledged, moves right on.) And the Reagan administration's "reliance on economic growth as its only anti-poverty strategy" resulted in the growing inequality that marked the 1980's.

To recalibrate our out-of-whack society, the authors join Jeffrey Madrick in prescribing redistribution—in their case, via billions spent on workfare. The moment has come, they write, for a great leveling: only heavier taxation of the rich,

*Random House, 223 pp., $22.00.

†Harvard University Press, 220 pp., $26.00.

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together with increased transfer policies resulting in "gains for poor and low-income workers," will suffice to "lower both poverty and inequality."

The inequality complaint is also at the heart of a third book, *The Winner-Take-All-Society*, a free-wheeling collaboration between Robert H. Frank, an expert on something called status competition, and Philip J. Cook, a specialist in the economics of lotteries.* Their work has a single thesis: "As the 1980's progressed, it became apparent that the competition for society's top positions was becoming more and more like participation in a lottery."

To be sure, the authors allow, this is a problem that has long existed in one form or another, and they quote Matthew to prove it: "For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." But today things have been made much worse by the media, by contemporary marketing techniques, and by simple greed. In baseball, for example, the league system and the reserve clause once blocked individual team owners from bidding up player salaries. Then winner-take-all pressures brought us free agency, and as a result the average salary of major-league players moved from $19,000 in 1968 to $1,076,089 in 1993, a period in which (the inequality warriors would insist) the median wage of the typical fan mostly stagnated or even fell.

Once a winner-take-all market is in place, it is hard to break out of it: ever greater gains accrue to the winners at ever greater costs to the losers. Frank and Cook quote an expert on compensation named Graef Crystal to the effect that while a corporate head

> earned total compensation (excluding perquisites and fringe benefits) that was around 35 times the pay of an average manufacturing worker in 1974, a typical CEO today earns pay that is around 120 times that of an average manufacturing worker and about 150 times that of an average worker in both manufacturing and service industries.

That, according to the authors, is why Reagan's tax cuts were of no use to the poor in the 1980's: the "trickle-down theory simply does not apply in economies pervaded by winner-take-all markets." Rather, the system is a zero-sum game, with all the accumulating bitterness, resentment, and potential for conflict and sabotage such a system necessarily entails.

THE FOURTH and final item in this grim collection is Robert J. Samuelson's *The Good Life and Its Discontents: The American Dream in the Age of Entitlement, 1945-1995*,† and it is a book of a somewhat different color. Samuelson is no relation to Paul J. Samuelson, the author of the standard textbook on Keynesian economics. But he is something of an economic fixture in his own right, having written for *Newsweek*, the *National Journal*, and the *Washington Post* for many years. His take on our economic situation: "In the United States today, things are much better than they seem."

According to Samuelson, things *seem* bad because that is what we are told by our opinion-makers, most of whom are products of the post-Depression, postwar baby boom. These are people who have no idea what bad times are really like. They (and therefore we) forget that even in the 1940's, 58 percent of Americans did not have central heating. They (we) take the 1950's to be the norm, when actually it was an exceptional decade. And they (we) also overrate the decade that followed, misunderstanding that the 1960's represented "simply an inflationary boom."

Nevertheless, though Samuelson does not share his colleagues' vision of our economy as an endless squabble over a finite pie, he too believes that we are faced by a formidable challenge. In fact, *The Good Life and Its Discontents* instructs us, it was 1960's cheer that led to our great mistake: government "came to make more commitments than it could possibly keep." Today, we know that our "most expansive hopes were unrealistic." Whatever our postwar experience may have seemed to suggest, we are not, in fact, entitled to prosperity—or to entitlements.

In a remarkable table, Samuelson shows the extent to which Thomas Jefferson's nation of yeomen has become a land of perpetual dependents: if we include Medicare, energy assistance, and Social Security, fully 51 percent of our families receive some form of federal payment. This, says Samuelson, is a luxury too dear—the more so since our prosperity has not made us particularly happy.

Samuelson is clearly a riven soul. He abhors entitlements and transfer payments, and thus sees positive harm in what the other books in this list either defend or take for granted. But he also abhors economic optimism—because, ac-

*Free Press/Martin Kessler Books, 272 pp., $25.00.

†Times Books, 293 pp., $25.00.

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cording to the iron logic of such things, it only encourages us to believe that we can afford programs like Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) or, more to the point, Medicare. The American dream, Samuelson suggests, is an all-but-permanent fantasy, killed by the conviction that "ultimately, everyone is entitled to everything." As for forcing us to wake up, Samuelson leans toward a sharp shock: what we need to set us right, he seems to suggest, is a whiff of a real Depression.

III

IF THERE is a common thread linking the first three of these books, it is their reliance on the median wage as the main index of economic health and "equality." That is also their common flaw, for the median wage is simply too narrow and circumscribed a figure on which to base social generalizations of their scope. It is certainly less reliable than per-capita GDP, a figure which, as it happens, has risen steadily. We continue to lead the world.

Still, for the sake of argument, let us begin by attending to our authors' claims about wages. In the most rudimentary sense, they are correct: since 1973, the median real wage, a figure adjusted for inflation, has dropped a bit. But "wage" is itself an increasingly inadequate term for compensation. In recent decades, the great shifts upward in compensation for most people have occurred not in wages or salaries but in benefits or transfer payments. Such non-wage compensations, the part of the average employee's total pay package *that is not counted* in the falling-wage debate, rose from 5 percent in 1948 to 18 percent in 1994; according to at least one calculation, the effect was to *increase* hourly compensation per worker in that period from $9.02 to $19.80 in constant dollars.

The strongest critique of the falling-wage argument has been issued lately by Michael Boskin, former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, the top White House economic advisory body. A commission created by the Senate and headed by Boskin has reexamined the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of inflation used to calibrate real income, and has concluded that the inflation figures used by economists for recent decades have been much too high. If so, that is good news for such inflation-indexed entitlements as Social Security and Medicare, which may be saved from bankruptcy, at least in the near term, if the new measure is used to determine future benefit increases. Moreover, if we base ourselves on Boskin's newly calculated rates, it turns out that earnings for male workers did not fall by 12 percent over the last two decades, they *rose* by 14 percent. Similarly, the number of Americans below the official poverty line, according to these figures, is half the previous estimate.

Lest this seem like so much sleight-of-hand, there is confirmation from other quarters as well that reality is not what our gloom-mongers tell us. The economists John Sabelhaus (of the Urban Institute) and Joyce Manchester (of the Congressional Budget Office) have compared the income-and-consumption pattern of baby-boomers in 1989 with that of their parents in the early 1960's. Although the older generation benefited from a (probably one-time) windfall in the appreciation of housing, the younger group had accumulated more wealth than its parents at the same age, *and* its per-capita income was also higher, by a full 55 percent. Hardly grounds, in short, for sitting on a low stool and grieving over "what we had."

WHEN THEY tire of the median wage, our authors turn to another trusted weapon in the armory of the income wars: distribution tables. These, however, produce even greater distortions.

By definition, income-distribution figures depict a rigid world of winners—the top decile or quintile—and losers—the bottom decile or quintile. It is true that in the years since 1973, those in the top decile, the "winners," have made greater gains than those in the bottom, largely because of the premium placed by high-tech societies like ours on education. But higher earners have also assumed a bigger financial responsibility for the "losers." When Congress lowered tax rates, more Americans got richer, and those increasingly rich Americans paid a higher share of taxes; this in turn enabled the government to spend more money on the poor, who also got richer.

Indeed, spending for the poor is itself a factor that affects the meaning of income-distribution figures. When such figures first began to be compiled many decades ago, those in the bottom quintile or decile lived on what they earned, and little else; the poor were indeed very poor. But then came the War on Poverty. As even Danziger and Gottschalk pause to note, the legislation of the 60's far outdid the New Deal in scope and outlay; between 1965 and 1975, spending on so-

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cial-welfare programs more than doubled, from 4.7 to 10.1 percent of Gross National Product (GNP). Since then, and particularly under Presidents Bush and Clinton, a cash-rebate program, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), has been put in place for the working poor; this program has ballooned so dramatically that the Treasury sent out $20 billion in EITC checks in the first nine months of 1995 alone.

Little of this is reflected in income-distribution tables. It is, however, reflected in the purchasing power of the U.S. poor. As the economist Bruce Bartlett has noted, Americans in the bottom quintile *spend* just about twice the income they officially report. Thus, some 60 percent of America's poor own videocassette recorders (compared with only 39 percent of all Danes and 35 percent of all Frenchmen). The U.S. still has poverty, but it is something substantially different from what went by that name before the Great Society.

Mobility plays a role as well. The picture that emerges from income-distribution charts is as static as *Upstairs, Downstairs*, but in fact America is an enormously fluid society. As Isabel Sawhill, a Clinton appointee, has documented, the much-reviled Reagan years were themselves very mobile ones, with millions of citizens moving up and down the income ladder. Tax-return data from 1979 to 1988 show, according to an analysis by the Joint Economic Committee, that 86 percent of those in the bottom quintile moved up, and 40 percent of those in the top two quintiles moved there from farther down.

Finally, there is, as Robert J. Samuelson correctly notes, the issue of history. If, like the authors of the other three books, one regards history as having effectively begun on V-J day, the downward trend of the median real wage does indeed look significant. But in the context of the larger movement of the century, it is a tiny bump on what is basically a straight line. And indeed, in that larger context, America today is about as "equal" as it was in 1945. The true high point of inequality in this century occurred in the Roaring 20's: in 1925, the rich took in 30 percent of all income as compared to under 20 percent today.

IV

SKIRMISHES OVER inequality can be maddening, or amusing. (The Labor Department under Robert Reich has produced so many blatantly politicized statistics that some House Republicans have begun to refer to a Reign of Error.) The real damage done is to prevent us from attending to the problem that does truly ail the nation: slow growth.

Once upon a time, before "stagflation," our growth averaged 4 percent a year, and economists employed phrases like "multiplier effect" to account for the job-creation generated by all that activity. Nowadays, we make do with a rate of between 2 and 3 percent. No wonder people speak of the economy as a zero-sum game. Although we are as yet far from the European situation—growth without jobs—we seem to have our own variant—growth without raises—and that is bad enough.

Yet thinking about inequality will not help here. Quite the contrary, what is needed is to focus on the true villains, the factors that retard us. These include overregulation and our inability thus far to meet the challenge posed by technology. (For those with ninth-grade math skills, there is no wage gap.) Least recognized of all among such retarding factors is inflation.

Let us go back to the magic year 1973, a great favorite of all our authors, presumably because it saw particularly high incomes that make subsequent drops look that much more dramatic. But in 1973 we were in the wage stage of a wage-price spiral, that ephemeral period when salaries have risen and the pain of inflation has not yet bitten, and we were experiencing what economists call "money illusion." Soon enough those higher wages subjected workers to higher tax rates—"bracket creep"—even as their wages came to buy them ever fewer goods.

Inflation is always regressive, but monetary changes as immense as the kind we saw in the 1970's create permanent divides. Nineteen-seventy-three was also the year in which President Nixon devalued the dollar, following on his 1971 decision to close the "gold window" and delink our currency from gold. Many observers, including Robert L. Bartley of the *Wall Street Journal*, believe this had a far greater effect than is usually conceded. With the dollar weakening, the value of real assets—gold, oil, and also property—skyrocketed, and the new high prices—double, triple, even quadruple what they had been a few years earlier—shut out younger buyers of homes.

Inflation also affects interest rates, a crucial element in whether we as families or individuals feel ourselves to be "winners" or "losers" in a given economic climate. The drop in the rate of a 30-year fixed mortgage, from 10 percent in

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1990 to 7.47 percent in 1994, provided opportunity of the kind writers like Danziger or Madrick *say* they covet: it enabled many working-class Americans to buy homes. (This was particularly significant for minorities, a part of the population whose suffering is highlighted by inequality specialists. The Federal Reserve estimates that the 2.5-point shift downward in rates enabled an additional 537,000 black families to qualify for mortgages.) But a drop to 5 percent—a figure common in the early 1960's—would have an even more dramatic effect, not only on the housing market but on business in general. It is a deep irony of this presidential season that the only candidate of either party to focus on the democratizing effects of low inflation is the one dismissed by the media as a plutocratic outlander, Steve Forbes.

IF GROWTH is the cure for inequality, it is also the test that all our authors, including even Samuelson, fail. To most of them, as we have seen, growth is a simple impossibility, and so they turn to schemes for redistributing national wealth that will surely bring about the very absence of growth they assume. Or they urge us to improve our technical competence by spending more on education, an appealing suggestion which unfortunately fails to square with the fact that American outlays per pupil already outpace levels in many European countries and Japan, with no noticeable effect on skills. Or they offer a series of blip-like proposals: expanding industrial policy to help build the information superhighway (Madrick); facing up to the need for individual responsibility (Samuelson); widening an already existing tax break for the working poor which already bids fair to outpace the cost of welfare (Danziger and Gottschalk); instituting more holidays (Cook and Frank).

Compared with this hodgepodge, the conservative Contract With America looks like a masterpiece of coherence and percipience. It is, indeed, a measure of how far modern redistributionists have strayed that they have rendered themselves oblivious to one of the first lessons of Keynesian economics. This was not always the case. An earlier tract on inequality in America by a frank redistributionist contained this simple thought: "It is the increase in output in recent decades, not the redistribution of income, which has brought the great material increase in the well-being of the average man." These words were true when John Kenneth Galbraith wrote them in *The Affluent Society*, and they remain true today.

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Why Mothers Should Stay Home

David Gelernter

AMERICAN CHILDREN are doing badly. From drug use to suicide rates, from academic performance to the perpetration of violence, the numbers tell us that they are failing. "Practically all the indicators of youth health and behavior," notes the education expert William Damon in his recent book, *Greater Expectations*,* "have declined year by year for well over a generation. None has improved."

There is little disagreement about one major cause of this general failure. "American parents," writes Elizabeth Fox-Genovese in her judicious and thoughtful *Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life*,† "spend 40-percent less time with their children than they did only a few decades ago—down from 30 hours a week to seventeen." And Karl Zinsmeister, a researcher at the American Enterprise Institute, elaborates:

> We have kicked out a lot of the social supports that used to undergird child-raising in this country: decent public schools in the cities, strong "backdoor" networks among parents, extended families and relatives nearby to help out, a safe public environment that allowed children to play outdoors without supervision.

The decline that so many have noticed did not happen overnight. It coincided, roughly speaking, with the surge-tide of a Motherhood Revolution. Over two decades, the proportion of married women aged 24 to 35 in the labor force rose steeply: from 32 percent in 1965 to 39 percent in 1970, 48 percent in 1975, 59 percent in 1980, and 65 percent in 1985.

COULD THERE be a connection between these two sets of facts? A substantial body of research suggests that, on the whole, it is better for children if their mothers stay home to care for them full time when they are small, and after school as they get bigger, than if mothers work and consign children to day care or nannies. As Todd Risley and Betty Hart point out in *Meaningful Differences*,** a child's intellectual development depends crucially on the amount of attention he gets from adults during the first three or four years, and one would be "hard-pressed" (Risley says) to locate a day-care center where attention is paid to children on anything like the level a full-time mother provides. Worse, the child psychologist Jay Belsky, once a leading de-

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†Doubleday, 275 pp., $23.95.

**Brookes Publishing, 256 pp., $22.00.

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fender of day care, conceded in 1986 that "a slow, steady trickle" of accumulating evidence showed that day care can do actual damage. Children in day care can develop weaker than desirable attachments to their mothers; and, according to a 1988 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, they can also show "heightened aggressiveness and noncompliance."

These findings are no surprise. They merely confirm what we already know: that, as Zinsmeister puts it, "someone caring for a child out of love will do a better job than someone doing it for pay." What is surprising is that virtually no one is willing to say out loud something else we know intuitively: that the Motherhood Revolution has been a disaster for our children.

Nowhere, for example, in William Damon's exhaustive catalogue of children's problems and their possible causes does the Motherhood Revolution arise as a possible contributing factor. On the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, Andrew Thomas, assistant attorney general of Arizona, discusses ominous behavioral trends; he warns that "if we care about our children as much as we say we do, then we must at least acknowledge that"—what? That white illegitimacy rates are high and growing, and divorce rates are high. As usual, the Motherhood Revolution is conspicuous by its absence. Even conservatives seem to believe that, to cite an article in the *Public Interest*, "the career of full-time wife, mother, and homemaker has simply ceased to be an adequate life project." End of discussion.

AND YET as a society we are plainly unsatisfied with this assertion. A vein of sad, desperate defensiveness runs through attempts to explain the Revolution. The main justification used to center on freedom and fairness: if men could have careers and families, women should too. "Most feminists," reports Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "see paid employment as the bedrock of women's new freedom." Women, after all, are just as capable as men. "I had not spent all those days in classrooms and all those nights with John Donne," writes Mary Cantwell of the *New York Times* in her book, *Manhattan, When I Was Young*,* "so that I could spend my time washing [my daughter] Kate's little shirts and nightgowns."

But recently this argument has lost ground. If the Revolution's goal was to produce happier mothers, modern mothers ought to be a reasonably cheerful lot. Some indeed *are* happier on the job than they would have been at home. Many others, however, will recognize their own stories in Mary Cantwell's:

> I have never been there when Katie rushed home from school . . . nor have I ever seen Margaret flushed and sleepy after an hour on her little cot. I do not even know which blanket she took from home. . . . I am stuffed with memories. . . . But I do not have these.

Fox-Genovese summarizes her extensive conversations with working mothers:

> Even when things go well, the pull between family and work can drive working mothers to distraction. When they go badly, the pressures and, above all, the feelings of guilt may become almost too much too bear.

In post-revolutionary America, happiness (it seems) does not abound.

And so our most-cited justification has changed; nowadays it centers not on freedom or the sanctity of careers, but on money. Here is Ann Hulbert in the *New Republic*: "the two-paycheck family, as even its detractors increasingly admit, is largely the product of economic necessity." "Only the cruel or the ignorant," writes Fox-Genovese, "would charge working women with selfishly choosing careers and self-realization over the interests of their families." And elsewhere: "the global economy has left most men unable to support a family without a second wage earner."

THE ECONOMIC-NECESSITY argument hits home with a nice solid thunk. Yet ultimately it makes no sense: as a nation we used to be a lot poorer, and women used to stay home. Of course there are many working mothers who labor to put bread on the table or provide a minimal living standard for their families. But the United States is an awfully rich country, and cases of true economic necessity cannot possibly account for so vast a social change as the Motherhood Revolution.

We are far wealthier than we were in 1965, when far fewer of our mothers worked; and the Revolution itself got under way during boom years—the late 60's and early 70's. True, from the mid-70's through the early 80's, and again from the late 80's through today, average wages stagnated or declined. But stagnation of averages does not mean that individuals fail to make gains as they work their way up. In absolute terms,

*Houghton Mifflin, 214 pp., $21.95.

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moreover, Americans throughout the post-1965 years have been significantly richer than ever before in history.*

In practice, the argument from economic necessity probably means not that American families must have more money but that they could *use* more—to stave off decline or slower than desired improvement in their living standards. In decades past, families coped with hard (or hardish) times in other ways, or made do with less. In 1935, average per-capita incomes were less than half today's, and food, clothing, and shelter accounted for almost 80 percent of the average American family's income; yet the proportion of working mothers was under a third what it is now. (Yes, there were fewer opportunities for women back then, but there were fewer opportunities for Jews as well, and for blacks—which did not prevent male Jews and blacks from joining the labor force as best they could.) From the end of World War II through the early 1950's, real wages fell as prices exploded. But the proportion of working mothers merely crept upward; there was no surge of the sort that began in the late 60's.

The economic gain when mothers work can be important to modern families. And possessions have value, too, not just in themselves but in relation to what everyone else has. It would be far more painful for a family to live 1935-style today than it was then. Still: the Motherhood Revolution represents a new American ethic, a clear-cut change in direction.

A GENERATION AGO, the same woman who now spends her days processing claims (say) in an insurance office would have spent them rearing her children instead—and would have lived in a smaller home than she occupies today, or rented a smaller apartment, or shared a car with her husband, or taken her washing to the laundromat, or never visited Disney World. Notwithstanding the financial sacrifice, many of today's mothers might well choose to stay home, too. What exactly has changed? Once, mothers were expected to stay home. Today they are expected to work.

Feminists like to argue that in 1935 mothers stayed home partly or mostly because of social pressure. If that argument is valid, it applies with equal and opposite force to working mothers today. Except for a few benighted precincts (the Mormon church, parts of the Orthodox Jewish community, parts of the Christian Right), society from Left to Right is lined up in force behind the idea of mothers taking jobs.

How this happened is a long and complicated story, but we can identify one big factor by asking simply who has benefited most from our present arrangements. After all, the woman's movement might have pursued a very different set of goals. It might have struggled to open fields that had been closed to working women, and simultaneously sought to imbue with dignity the position of full-time mother. It might have championed a national corps of full-time mothers as the mainstay of community and civil society. It might have lobbied for mothers to take over central roles in running the schools and local government. No nation in history ever had the luxury of full-time, well-educated mothers; if we had put them in central roles, a cultural and civic renaissance might have ensued.

Sounds quaint today. In the event, feminists took inspiration instead from Clara's song in Goethe's *Egmont*: "*Welch Glück sondergleichen, ein Mannsbild zu sein!*" "What matchless luck, to be a man!" To be worthy of respect is to do what men do.

Notice here that the Motherhood Revolution has followed the same basic pattern as the sexual revolution—and no pattern is more important in understanding modern America. The sexual revolution erased a traditional social constraint against unmarried sex. Men were on the whole delighted with the removal of this constraint, and quick to benefit. Women have become increasingly open about their unhappiness. An implicit message of (for example) the anti-"date rape" campaign is that where sex is concerned, the level playing field is a myth.

In the heyday of liberation, it used to seem as if the old social rule prohibiting unmarried sex were like the airport barrier that separates arriving passengers from the long-lost relatives who have come to greet them. Remove the barrier and a joyful rushing together would follow. It has now dawned on many people that the prohibition was no airport barrier after all; it was more like a cage at the zoo. Men were fenced in. Women were protected.

The social rule decreeing that mothers stay home functioned in much the same way. Some women were indeed constrained; many others were protected. Most mothers, my guess is, have

* See "Doom, Gloom, and the Middle Class" by Amity Shlaes, beginning on p. 19 of this issue.—ED.

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always valued the best interests of their children above money or power or prestige, and still do. ("In general," writes Fox-Genovese, mustering Harris and Roper polls and expert opinion to back up her assertion, "women still feel bound to children in a way most men do not.") And I would claim, too, that the typical husband would *always* have been happy to pack his wife off to work; he had no need of Betty Friedan to convince him that better income in exchange for worse child care was a deal he could live with. Society used to restrain husbands from pressuring their wives (overtly or subtly) to leave the children and get a job. No more.

Lifting the barrier produced basically the same effect on the labor market as it did on the sexual scene. The loudest revolutionaries went on doing exactly what they had been doing: casual sex goes way back, and working mothers do, too. But millions of others were left unprotected, without the barricade that used to shelter the typical woman from the predatory interests of the typical man.

I AM A beneficiary of the Motherhood Revolution myself. It is a rare day when I do not gain directly from the presence of talented working mothers all around me (not to mention my large indirect gains from living in a wealthier country). In science and engineering, where women are especially rare, they are especially welcome. I would be in bad shape without my female colleagues—who are, as a group, significantly more interesting than the men. The scientist in her lab, the stock analyst making millions, the lawyer leading her team: do I want all those working mothers to quit and go home? Of course not. Neither do their bosses; neither do their subordinates; neither do their husbands.

Do their children? Should their children? We cannot quite bring ourselves to answer; so we never ask.

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Leaving the Ghetto

Jacob Katz

We know a great deal by now about how the history of European Jewry in the modern era came to its tragic end. But what about the beginning of the period, when great hopes were abroad for a decisive change in the historical fortunes of the Jews? Suddenly, a community which since the Middle Ages had lived in the lands of Christian Europe as a tolerated fringe group seemed destined to be integrated into the life of the surrounding society.

The idea of their integration was nowhere initiated by the Jews themselves. Rather it was a by-product of the major transformations occurring throughout Europe in the wake of the French Revolution. The different strata of society, hitherto gathered in various organizational frameworks according to rank and occupation, were expected to dissolve, and to find their place within the new national entity; there were to be no more "states within a state." So too with the Jewish community, which had long been administered by its own unique laws and was therefore seen to be trespassing upon the domain of the sovereign state. It too was expected to cede its autonomy, and its members, like all other citizens, were henceforth to regard themselves as living directly under the rule of the national authority.

The Jews would indeed leave the confines of the physical ghetto; but their old habits of internal cohesion would die hard. So, at any rate, it seemed to outside observers. Writing in 1793, the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte accused the Jews of Europe of acting as a united body even in the absence of any formal Jewish authority. To Fichte, the mutual and spontaneous bonds among the various segments of European Jewry were tantamount to a kind of government, with the result that a *de-facto* Jewish state could be said to extend throughout the whole of Europe, a state hostile to the interests of the several European powers.

Fichte's anti-Jewish animus aside, was there any basis to his claim of a sort of pan-Jewish community? There was. In this transitional period, European Jewry was divisible into two parts: the Ashkenazi, which extended from the Ukraine in the east to Alsace in the west; and the Sephardi, whose centers were in London, Amsterdam, and Venice. Each of these two parts lay scattered over different lands of residence, across which stretched economic, familial, and religious-cultural ties. Within each part there was a certain degree of international move-

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ment, and the two parts also enjoyed a measure of mutual economic contact and assistance.

This is what was supposed to change. The all-encompassing sovereign state would fulfill its obligation to absorb the Jews living within its national boundaries; in return, they would not only forge bonds with their fellow inhabitants but, concomitantly, weaken their ties with Jews living elsewhere. As each segment of European Jewry became naturalized in its place of residence, the mobility so characteristic of the Jews in the traditional period would come to an end.

THOUGH THESE assumptions were never spelled out explicitly, they were clearly on the minds of European politicians. Thus, at the Congress of Vienna after the fall of Napoleon in 1814-15, representatives of the Germanic states debated whether the rights won by the Jews during the French occupation should remain in force. Prussia was one country which, on its own initiative, had granted certain rights to the Jews in 1812, and it now urged the adoption of a uniform civil status for them throughout the Germanic lands. When their proposal was defeated, however, the Prussians turned around and abolished many of the laws they had themselves enacted for the benefit of their own Jews. There is no doubt that they feared a wave of immigration that would upset the new principle of local absorption and local naturalization.

Hungary offers an example of a different kind. During the first half of the 19th century, that country underwent an accelerated process of economic modernization accompanied by a national awakening. This attracted a flood of Jewish arrivals from neighboring Moravia, Bohemia, and Galicia. It also led to the unsuccessful 1848 revolution against Austrian hegemony. Not until 1867 did Hungary gain a measure of independence under Franz Deák, by which time Hungary's Jews numbered a half-million. Deák instituted a number of internal reforms, including equal rights for the Jews, but at the same time he also weighed carefully the desirability of restricting immigration. Although ultimately he refrained, it is clear that in Hungary, too, the idea of emancipation was tied up with the expectation that Jews elsewhere should solve their own problems in their own lands.

Jewish mobility was not the only nettlesome matter which European statesmen hoped to resolve with emancipation; they were also concerned with the pattern of Jewish economic activity. As long as the Jews lived in ghettos or in ghetto-like conditions, their occupations were defined for them by local authorities. Usually, this restricted them to brokerage and various other credit operations involving the investment of capital, from peddling to large-scale commerce and finance. Here and there they were also permitted a craft of some sort. Not surprisingly, with the removal of legal barriers that were supposedly to blame for the one-sided nature of Jewish occupations, it was generally believed that they would branch out into other fields. To speed up the process, some governments offered incentives to those willing to take up agriculture or certain trades. Most, however, simply assumed that with free citizenship, human nature would take its beneficent course.

Still another issue tied up with emancipation concerned the substance and future of Judaism. To outsiders, the religion of the ghetto dwellers seemed strange and foreign, the result of excessive adherence to an outdated, petrified tradition. It was widely assumed that such a religion, with its exotic rituals and burdensome restrictions, could not stand up to the conditions of freedom. There were, moreover, particular Jewish practices—the custom of burying the dead on the day they died, the use of rabbis as judges in financial disputes—which the state was prepared to abolish outright, holding them to be infringements upon its own jurisdiction. In some places, the authorities even arrogated to themselves the right to make changes in religious rituals, for example by substituting German for Hebrew as the language of public prayer.

In general, the belief was widespread that with emancipation, Jews would come to embrace the ways of the surrounding Christian society. As to the intensity of this embrace, there were differences of opinion. Devout Christians held fast to the idea that Jews were fated to acknowledge the truth of Christianity and to convert. Many such people had earlier opposed emancipation altogether, on the grounds that the Jews deserved to be humiliated for persisting stubbornly in their error; once emancipation was an accomplished fact, they hoped it would spur the Jews to their final destiny. Less orthodox Christians entertained such hopes as well, based in their case not on Church dogma but on the conviction that Christianity embodied an exalted philosophical or ethical message. Still others thought it would be sufficient if the Jews reformed their own religion, so that it would no longer be an obstacle to the performance of their civic duties, or a barrier between them and their neighbors. Finally, there were those who had themselves renounced

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Christianity and hoped to find in emancipated Jews kindred souls and partners in the struggle for secular ideals.

AND WHAT did the Jews make of the various visions of the future projected by their emancipators?

For an answer to this question we may turn in the first instance to the contemporaneous Jewish press. From the time of their founding in the late 1830's and early 1840's, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* in Leipzig, the *Archives Israélites* in Paris, and the *Jewish Chronicle* in London tracked the struggles of both West and East European Jews for their rights. In particular, these papers reported the readiness of Western Jews to assist their brethren in the East—a readiness which stemmed in part from feelings of solidarity but which had a self-interested side as well. In Germany, France, and England, Jews saw their own chances in society put into jeopardy by the prospect of a new influx of Eastern Jews bearing the stamp of the ghetto.

For a long time this threat lacked a basis in reality. Jewish migration hardly ceased in the 19th century, but until relatively late in the century most of it originated in Germany and Austria, was destined for the United States, and did not attract much notice. Only in the 1870's did migration from the East gain momentum, first in Romania and then in Russia. In Bucharest, the American consul, Benjamin Franklin Peixotto, conceived a plan to resettle half of Romania's Jews—some 100,000—in the United States, and to this end he tried to secure the assistance of West European Jewry. Peixotto even called for an assembly of Jewish representatives in Brussels to resolve the issue, but most did not respond; the reason, according to the contemporary writer Berthold Auerbach, was fear that such a migration would make all of European Jewry look like a band of gypsies.

For the Jews of Western Europe, then, just as for the emancipators, the solution to the Jewish problem lay in absorption into the surrounding society. And if Jews were thus at one with their emancipators on the desirability of local integration—which implied, willy-nilly, a loosening of their ties to Jews elsewhere—they agreed as well that integration meant the abandonment of traditional patterns of Jewish livelihood. Though the course to be followed was not absolutely clear, one step taken by every major Jewish community from Paris to Budapest was to place Jewish boys in apprenticeships with non-Jewish artisans. This was not an inexpensive proposition. The necessary funds came from wealthy Jews who viewed the scheme as a way of erasing the image of Jews as hucksters out to make easy profits at the expense of those laboring by the sweat of their brow.

On one issue, however—religion—Jewish and Gentile opinion differed significantly. Jewish citizens aspired to be accepted into society as Jews. Even those who saw a need for religious reform—reform that often seemed, in practice, a slavish imitation of Christian models—viewed it as a legitimate development within the Jewish faith and took pains not to include any overt symbols of Christianity. Moreover, Reform and Orthodox Jews alike strove to establish their religion on an equal footing with Christianity. Not only were they confident that Judaism would continue to exist, they believed it would flourish and gain a new lease on life.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, the process of integration began on both sides in an atmosphere of raised expectations and widespread hopefulness. The question we need to ask ourselves now is whether this was warranted—not in the light of hindsight, of later circumstances which could never have been predicted at the outset, but in light of the realities of the time.

It would indeed have been feasible for each European state to have absorbed its Jews if all had decided upon this course simultaneously. But that was never a serious possibility. The emancipation of the Jews required, in each state, the attainment of a certain level of political, economic, and cultural development, and in 19th-century Europe there was no uniformity on this front.

Consider the single, broadly cultural issue of relations between church and state. Although the downfall of the *ancien régime* ended the subservience of the latter to the former, and hence the doctrinally driven insistence that Jews be kept in an inferior position, this was a slow process, and it did not immediately affect all states with Jewish populations. Austria, for example, continued to see itself as a Catholic nation, and Russia as a Slavic and Russian orthodox one. Without basic changes in these two governments, the Jews there could hardly hope to become citizens. Meanwhile, even the most liberal nations did not go so far as to deny their links to Christianity.

The promise of economic diversification also failed to materialize following emancipation. Even with the abolition of restrictive laws, the Jews remained a distinct minority, and peculiar as well in their choice of vocations. This is a phenomenon that is common to all religious or ethnic minorities

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everywhere, and it has been treated extensively in the work of modern economists (in the case of the Jews especially by Simon Kuznets). At the time, it was commented upon by Johann Gottfried Hoffman, who made an exhaustive study of Jewish demographics. Hoffman refuted the accusation that Jews were congenitally incapable of rough physical labor by pointing to the many Jewish peddlers who set out on the road with packs of merchandise on their backs and meager rations of dried food. Such men were hardly less "physical" than farmers or factory workers. Why, then, did Jews prefer peddling to other forms of work? The reason, according to Hoffman, was social: it kept them in contact with other members of their community with whom they could observe the requirements of their religion.

Since their nonconformist faith prevented the Jews from being absorbed into their local communities, and also from integrating into the wider economy, the success of the emancipators' project came to depend upon the hope for conversion. From our vantage point it may seem absurd that such a hope could be seriously entertained, but in fact many Christians at the time believed in it. And with some cause: there were more than a few cases of conversion among the Jews who first emerged from the ghetto—enough, indeed, for the German Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz to speak of *Massentaufe*, or mass conversion.

This, however, was a serious overstatement. Instances of true mass conversion in history have always depended on a charismatic leader who draws after him an entire community. There was, quite simply, no chance of this happening in the rationalistic atmosphere of 19th-century Europe. Most Jewish converts tended to act out of pragmatic considerations of career and social advancement, or out of dissatisfaction with their own religion, or both. In any event, each conversion was a personal affair, or at most involved an entire family. Mass conversion was out of the question.

WAS THERE, then, any possibility that the Jews collectively might have been accepted in Europe on their *own* terms—that is, as a community, with a religion opposed to Christianity? When it granted the Jews civil rights, the state did commit itself to tolerating Judaism; but this tolerance took the form of a grudging resignation, which never extended beyond the absolute minimum. A common lament by spokesmen of the German-Jewish community throughout the 19th century was that while Jews had been emancipated, Judaism had not. By this they meant that Jewish religious institutions—the rabbinate, the seminaries, the formal community—did not enjoy the benefits granted to comparable Christian institutions.

Moreover, Judaism itself continued to be denigrated in public, especially under the aegis of the churches whose influence continued to be felt throughout the post-revolutionary states. The churches provided secular leaders with moral legitimacy, in exchange for protection and various benefits. As Jews kept a distance between themselves and the churches, they were in turn kept at arm's length from the institutions of the state and excluded from the ranks of its servants.

In this indirect way, Judaism remained an obstacle to full citizenship. In Germany, for example, universities could not appoint professors without first obtaining the consent of the local government; consequently, regulations that barred Jews from government service also kept them out of academia. As for the enlightened professoriate, its members made no efforts to fight such discrimination: indeed, they could not see why conversion from Judaism—in their view, a move from the spiritually and ethically inferior to the spiritually and ethically superior—should present difficulties to any Jew intent on pursuing an academic career. Theodor Mommsen, the famous classical scholar and the only Gentile to take a stand against the anti-Semitism of his colleague Heinrich von Treitschke, wrote that while he would never ask a believing Jew to convert, he could not understand why secular Jews should be at all reluctant to do so. Apparently it never occurred to him that there was a significant difference between distancing oneself from one's religion and embracing another.

These patronizing attitudes offended the Jews collectively and individually, although as a general rule they tended to view them as vestigial and expected that in time they would disappear. Yet the bewilderment of a Mommsen reflected a deep problem, as well as a failure to develop intellectual concepts adequate to a changed reality. In the premodern era, the Jewish community had been recognized as having its own culture, at the heart of which lay its religion. The modern state, for its part, defined the Jews solely in terms of that religion; indeed, no other category lay at its disposal. To a certain extent this characterization was accurate, since in their transition to modernity the Jews had indeed shed all but the faintest remnants of their premodern culture. Yet in a larger sense it was totally unsuitable, for whole sectors of the community had also ceased to uphold the fundamentals of

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the Jewish religion and its unified patterns of ritual. What secular Jews remained attached to was not easy to define, but neither, for the Jews involved, was it easy to let go of: there were family ties, economic interests, and perhaps above all sentiments and habits of mind which could not be measured, and could not be eradicated.

Not surprisingly, the Jewish community became an enigma to observers both within and without. Jewish intellectuals did come up with a host of theories to account for and to justify this paradoxical situation, but no one managed to coin a key phrase to define it (in the way that "pluralism," for instance, captures the ethnic situation in today's United States). In fact, the reality was too complicated to be encapsulated in a simple formula.

But if Jewish observers could not find the magic words, their enemies and ill-wishers did—specifically, through the concept of race. Originally a purely anthropological category without any necessarily negative connotation, this term no sooner gained currency than it became pressed into service to explain all the defects, real or fancied, of the Jews, from their cosmopolitanism, to their avoidance of manual labor, to their exploitation of others, to their "tribal" religion which allegedly lacked any spiritual depth or ethical foundation. Once the concept of race became infused with anti-Semitism, it became a most efficient instrument of political propaganda. If it did not actually create, it certainly deepened the alienation of the Gentile public from the Jews, and thus, in the fullness of time, it helped to set the conditions for Nazism.

A NEGLIGIBLE MINORITY in a Christian world, the Jews of Europe were never the masters of their own destiny. This was so in the Middle Ages, and it remained so in modern times. Just as their seclusion from society at large had been imposed upon them during the time of the ghetto, so their attempt at integration in the modern age was likewise directed by external circumstances.

To us, looking back, this may seem to lend the saga of the European Jews a certain air of doom foretold. Yet who among us, even knowing what finally lay in store for them, can blame them for having seized the modern opportunity, or for having imagined that it spelled the end of their historic tribulations? Who among us, desirous of honoring their memory, would dare to judge their long and ardent struggle against the vise of circumstance?

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Down With Self-Esteem

Joseph Adelson

RECENTLY I dropped in at my local library to see what they had on a subject, self-esteem, that now commands enormous attention in our everyday discourse. I thought I would find a few titles. There were *41*, mostly quite recent. Then I went to the bookstore—really a megastore—across the street from my psychotherapy office. There I expected to find at most a shelf-ful. There were 49 shelves, each three feet long, holding altogether at least 1,000 separate titles. Almost all were less than five years old, and almost all offered practical help: how to protect your self-esteem, improve your self-esteem, repair your self-esteem; seven steps, ten steps, twelve steps to a better view of yourself; self-esteem through physical fitness or a more balanced diet; how women should deal with men who damage their self-esteem; how to guarantee the self-esteem of your children; how to recover self-esteem after losing your job, or your fiancée, or your spouse.

Obviously there is a great deal of distress in the land, and that is hardly a phenomenon to be dismissed. But I was looking for *information* about self-esteem—how to define it, what forms it takes, its origins, what sustains or damages it—and in all these books I found next to nothing. I could see that they were sometimes intelligent and sometimes not, sometimes useful and sometimes not. If they had anything in common, it was an air of utter certainty. What they lacked was knowledge.

And then I was reminded of another book I had read several years ago, when I was asked to review it for this magazine. Since the book was by Gloria Steinem, I thought I would learn from it what, if anything, was new in feminist doctrine. But it turned out that feminism was at most a secondary concern of *Revolution From Within**; instead, the book was about self-esteem. It is in fact a paean to this commodity, a continuous accolade. According to Steinem, self-esteem is the source of all good, its absence a sure sign of failure and despair. The effects of self-esteem are to be seen locally, nationally, even globally. The very rise and fall of nations can be measured by self-esteem. To Steinem, as I wrote in my review,

> Self-esteem is everywhere and everything, a universal elixir, the philosopher's stone, a mantra, cause and effect, chicken and egg, alpha and omega, self-esteem *über alles*, self-esteem forever.

Indeed, Steinem's own self-esteem is such that in this book she holds forth on any and all issues that cross her mind. I was especially taken aback

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by her criticisms of Harvard's Edward O. Wilson, one of the great scientists of our time, whom she does not hesitate to correct on matters pertaining to his own specialty. Nor is this an isolated incident. She pronounces as well on psychoanalysis, about which she is profoundly ignorant, on economics, on political science, on sociology. Nothing—simply nothing—is outside the reach of her judgment.

IN SOME sense, Gloria Steinem is herself clearly a tribute to the powers of self-esteem. After all, it has won her everything. A woman whose success in life has recently been certified by the appearance of a 400-page biography,* she was even invited to be the keynote speaker at the last annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, there to deliver the predictable platitudes and to be fawned over by the celebrity-hungry officers of the association. But if I am right about Steinem's pronounced intellectual limitations—and I am—then the link between self-esteem and achievement is rather more twisted and opaque than she and others have led us to believe.

In the common conception, the more self-esteem you have, the better you will feel, and the better you will perform at every challenge life sends your way. An infusion of self-esteem will produce heightened degrees of tenacity, endurance, drive, imagination, creativity, and all the other virtues needed for success. But what of those many instances in which a person feels much better about himself than he should? Gloria Steinem is one possibility; but what about my Uncle Jack?

My Uncle Jack thought the world of himself; he also suffered a steady string of business failures. To explain these, Jack had in place a remarkable system of denials, justifications, and rationalizations which lifted all blame and kept him optimistically primed for the next disastrous venture. Was my Uncle Jack's self-esteem real, or only a mimicry of the real, Steinemian thing? And how do we tell? Suppose that Jack's continuing failures had been followed by a smashing success which left him rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Would he have been just a fool who got lucky, or a true adept, who had been wise enough to keep the faith despite early setbacks?

And that is a relatively easy case. What about its opposite, the successful achiever who suffers from *low* self-esteem? A patient of mine, now no longer alive, sought my help for an increasingly severe depression which was leading him to contemplate suicide. He was then in his early fifties, a professor in the humanities. What made his story ominous was that he had made a very serious attempt at taking his life 25 years earlier, so serious that he had been left comatose for a month. As for his current depression, problems in love or attachment did not seem to be operative. Career, then? He told me he was well thought of, but that he was fooling people: his work was really not very good at all.

The vehemence with which he said this troubled me, and moved me to look up references to him in the literature of his field. Not only was he mentioned therein—he was extolled. This sad, self-deprecating, self-loathing man was a titanic figure, someone who decades earlier had produced a work which was instantly acclaimed a classic, and who had retained that high reputation ever since.

Starting from this telltale clue, I was able to decipher the circumstances of his earlier, near-fatal suicide attempt. It had taken place when he was still an assistant professor, and had received a call that his dean wanted to see him. On the way there, he found himself becoming anxious, then panicky; suddenly the sky turned black (to use his words) and he was overcome by a nameless terror. Entering the dean's suite of offices, he began shouting and cursing, and threatening to kill himself. He was calmed down and sent home. There he immediately went to the medicine cabinet and swallowed the bottle of sleeping pills he had purchased a few days earlier.

A commonsense interpretation of this incident would hold that he was afraid: the dean was going to give him bad news, he would not be kept on, he was a failure. But in fact he had known beforehand that this would not be the case. His recently published dissertation had been a hit, and the dean was eager to keep him from being snatched away. His own chairman had informed him that the dean would be calling, and what the good news would be: promotion to tenure, at a considerable boost in salary. It was, in fact, that good news—the culmination of all his dreary years in the library—which sent him over the edge, into a near-psychotic episode.

How shall we understand it? As ever, Freud has been there before us, specifically in his paper "Those Wrecked by Success." There, citing the compelling literary examples of Shakespeare's

* *The Education of a Woman: The Life and Times of Gloria Steinem* by Carolyn Heilbrun (Doubleday, 1995).

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Lady Macbeth and Rebecca West in Ibsen's great drama, *Rosmersholm*, he discusses individuals who fall apart upon the realization of their fondest dreams. One might object that Freud's cases are aberrations—but in truth, though atypical, they are not so rare as all that. The general category here is moral masochism, a term that encompasses all those who so arrange their lives as to assure frustration and defeat.

Moral masochism does not usually produce catastrophe, as in Freud's examples or in the case I have given. More often it shows itself silently. For people afflicted by it, nothing—no success—seems to go right. They ask the wrong teachers for recommendations. They find the wrong person to marry, several times in a row. They time things wrong. They strike while the iron is cold. They hit a beautiful shot to the green, then miss a ten-inch putt. They exhibit what may appear to be bad judgment but what is in fact excellent judgment, perfectly designed to accomplish their disappointment, to turn success into failure.

Another case stands out in my memory, that of one of the most brilliant graduate students it has been my pleasure to teach. He went through our difficult program without any trouble, but then, when it came time to choose a thesis topic and an adviser, he made the worst possible move, choosing a crabby, rigid, empiricist who simply hated cleverness. When I heard what my student had done, I dragged him into my office and asked whether he had gone out of his mind. He was imperturbable. It was going to be just fine, he said, adding politely that I should mind my own business.

Things turned out exactly as I had anticipated. His adviser loaded on one mindless statistical test after another. His dissertation ballooned until he ran out of funding and had to leave the graduate program to take a lackluster job. By the time he returned to complete his degree some years later, he had lost much of his keen brilliance.

One is tempted to view this lamentable outcome in terms of a wrong choice, or of bad advice. Had my student chosen differently, things would have turned out better. But this is to overlook the remarkable energy, however silent and insidious, invested by him in snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

IN SHORT, the nexus between self-esteem and success is rather more complicated than Gloria Steinem and all the others suggest. How do we rate, and how ought we to handle, the socially popular but mediocre youngster, whose self-judgment accurately reflects that reality; the youngster who is average in most respects, and quite content to remain so; the youngster who is a star, and is seen as such by everyone, yet is disappointed in himself? A great many questions of definition have not yet been raised, let alone answered. And even more troublesome are questions of substance, the questions that arise when you lift your gaze from the treatises and look out upon the world of actual experience.

We have, for one thing, undoubtedly exaggerated the role played by schools in establishing children's feelings of self-worth. As a general rule, children are not quite so vulnerable as the new literature would lead us to think, and when they are vulnerable, it is usually because of conditions and circumstances which predate the school setting. Moreover, children have techniques for protecting themselves in that setting—when, for example, a teacher is felt to be unfair, or overly strict, or otherwise bent on reducing their self-esteem.

Looking back upon my own boyhood, I can remember quite clearly how often our grade-school teachers would try to shame us. At least once a week we would be told that we were the most disobedient, disrespectful class they had ever encountered. For fifteen minutes we would be browbeaten into submission, and then life would resume. I do not for a moment suggest that such experiences were unimportant to us; to the contrary, we were the children of immigrants who had bet everything on their children's being "good in school." But this was an imperative which stood alone, and was not indivisibly connected with our sense of total well-being. Or so I remember it.

As for my high-school days, they could not have been more demanding. I attended what would now be called a fast-track school, the kind of place where one had to take an admissions exam (which, needless to say, most failed). Once admitted, we were informed rather gleefully by the headmaster that it was the school's intention to fail two students out of every three admitted; and so it rather gleefully proceeded to do.

I have never been in an environment with so many intimidating peers—not in college, not in graduate school, not in a university department, not in a think tank. I am not referring to their cultivation, or learning, or imagination; just their intelligence, their sheer brain power. In this

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school we learned rather quickly that no matter how good we thought we were, there were others who were better, and this perception was reinforced by teachers who would lecture us on the great traditions of the school and the many famous statesmen and scholars it had trained, to whom we were not likely to live up.

All in all, I cannot imagine an environment better designed to erode self-confidence and hence to reduce achievement. But did it? Or did it goad us to try harder, to prove our teachers wrong? So far as I can tell it did neither. The students who had chosen this ordeal should have been obsessed with grades. In truth, many were obsessed, but rarely with grades. We soon learned our level—that is, what we could achieve given our talent, the standards set by our fellow students, and, above all, the amount of effort we were willing to expend. Once that level was known, we adjusted our self-satisfaction to it.

In my own case, I learned that without excessive effort I could do well enough in the verbal fields—English, languages, and history—but that in mathematics and science I would never do more than scrape by unless I extended myself, which I did not want to do. With the energy thus saved, I put my talents elsewhere, trying to start a new literary magazine (it lasted just one issue) and writing a musical comedy which for some reason never made it to Broadway. In others of my fellow students the widest variety of passions held reign, from an immersion in the esoterica of contemporary art to the search for a formula to beat the horses. What was important most of the time, in most instances, was not the search for glory but the activity itself. Once the path was chosen, self-esteem in the usual sense did not play much of a role.

After obtaining my doctorate, my first serious job was at Bennington College, a small school then enrolling only women, and known for an emphasis on the arts unusual at that time in institutions of higher learning. (We are speaking now of the early to mid-50's.) As a result of this fact, the college operated in a buyer's market; it was able to recruit some extraordinarily gifted young teachers who could earn enough money to survive while practicing their discipline. A recent article on Bennington and its current travails in the *New York Times Magazine* refers to this period as the college's golden age, and so it was.

Although some among the faculty were already on the threshold of distinction and national recognition, at the time I knew them it was not at all clear who would and who would not rise to eminence, or indeed if any would. In reading biographies of the famous, we know what the outcome will be, and, aware that all obstacles in the path will somehow be overcome, we tend to make light of them. It is a very different matter when a career is seen as it unfolds, *in medias res*, with the protagonist hoping for the best yet utterly uncertain about what direction to take, or even what line best suits his gifts.

Bennington in those years was a seedbed of one of the great revolutions in our century's art, the rise of abstract expressionism. That movement is now so familiar, indeed so conventional, that it is hard to remember the violent emotions that greeted its birth—excitement at one extreme, more commonly derision. Researchers who find self-esteem hidden in every crevice of behavior will tell you that those who helped found the movement manifested that quality by definition; otherwise, they would have chosen a less perilous path. But this is utterly circular, and also highly romanticized. In fact the vanguard artists did not on the whole show many signs of high self-regard.

To the contrary, many of them were alcoholics; some, like the painter Jackson Pollock, destroyed themselves directly through drink; others died very young as a result of drinking too much for their bodies to absorb, as in the case of my Bennington friend, the writer Shirley Jackson; others simply killed themselves outright. What the votaries of self-esteem never seem to remember is the extraordinarily high correlation between artistic achievement (literary achievement in particular) and severe depression and suicide. That correlation has held for several centuries at least.

So what, in the end, *do* we know about self-esteem? As huge as is the outpouring of books designed to laud and to enhance this elusive quality, the amount of serious research or theoretical writing on the subject is surprisingly small. Until just a few years ago, most textbooks in developmental psychology did not even list self-esteem in the index.

As for actual findings, few of them come as a surprise. The most important is that, like almost all other traits of personality, self-esteem starts early and stays late. Those who think either well or poorly of themselves as young children will continue to do so into adulthood, and, within limits, under almost any circumstances. Al-

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though some of our greatest dramas and works of fiction are built around acts of personal transformation, they are dramas precisely because they are improbable—out of the ordinary. In the typical course of events we find continuity: Johnny, a troublesome child at four, is troublesome at nine, and by the time he reaches adolescence he is a handful, perhaps even beyond reach.

Self-esteem, then, is very deeply rooted, and once in place it is hard—not impossible, but hard—to dislodge or overcome. I put this so strongly precisely because the self-esteem literature, particularly in the field of education, does not. Rather, rejecting the notion that character is destiny, it prefers in its utopian way to believe in the infinite openness of personality. In this literature, self-esteem is not inherent but circumstantial, and can be raised or lowered by a teacher's behavior. It is also extraordinarily delicate, and easily bruised.

I have already indicated my skepticism with regard to this last assertion, which has become bedrock to the entire education industry. As Charles Sykes spells out in gruesome detail in his recent book, *Dumbing Down Our Kids*,* the need to preserve a student's good opinion of himself is now assumed by educators to take clear priority over achieving academic excellence; the latter, indeed, is seen as a weapon aimed at the former, and the teacher's primary task is to blunt that weapon. For—the reasoning goes—if the work is too hard, the child will be discouraged and will be unable to learn. As Sykes takes pains to point out, there is no evidence at all to support this idea; it is a fiction, born of ideology.

But what a powerful fiction it is. In *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, one of the most widely cited recent works in education, girls are said to do more poorly in school because their teachers prefer boys, calling on them more often and in general taking them more seriously, thus damaging girls' self-esteem.† Even on its face this is an odd claim. The teachers in question are by a wide majority female; why would they demean their own sex? But that aside, the fact is that girls do *better* in school than boys. As Diane Ravitch has documented, boys are much more likely to be held back, and are much more often placed in special-education classes during high school. A larger percentage of girls go on to college, and women receive more than half of the bachelor's and master's degrees. Women will very soon overtake men in law and medicine, as they have already done in other professional fields. There are many more statistics along the same lines, none of which will have the slightest effect on the purveyors of self-esteem as the be-all and end-all of educational philosophy.

TO ANYONE genuinely concerned about the next cohort of Americans, the real question today is not what we can do to improve self-esteem—to which the answer is: very little—but whether we can survive an ideology so hostile to achievement. The decline in competence over the last two generations in our country is by now a commonplace; so, too, are the dismal findings from international comparisons of academic quality. We are very far from recuperating from these losses, the *greatest* of which are to be found among our most talented students who function at levels well below their capacity.

I teach a senior-level course in adolescent psychology, and on an exam last semester I asked my students to comment on the state of American high schools, drawing on their own experience. Without a single exception, I received in return a litany of complaints. My students complained about how much time was wasted in high school, how few challenges were presented to them, how much energy was devoted to trivial subject matter; they even complained about the paucity of homework. A number reported that only their parents' pressure and encouragement induced them to go beyond what the school offered.

As a group, these students are among the very finest at my university. By today's academic standards they have done quite well. But their true capacities have not been tested, and they know it. This is hardly good news for their self-esteem—or for ours—and it is very bad news indeed for our future.

* St. Martin's, 341 pp., $23.95.

† For a fuller discussion of this book, see Rita Kramer's "Are Girls Shortchanged in School?" in the June 1992 COMMENTARY.

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As Quebec Goes . . .

William Watson

In a poll taken last year, only 1 percent of American respondents knew that the Prime Minister of Canada was Jean Chrétien—a result that elicited dismay here, but not surprise. What is widely regarded as profound American ignorance about Canada taps a deep vein of resentment in this country, especially since most Canadians think of themselves as having built by far the superior society, a claim which, while possibly true, is notably at odds with what we also invariably regard as our greater modesty and self-deprecation.

Canada's life in obscurity was shattered, however, this past October. What made us briefly famous was not some "Worthwhile Canadian Initiative" (the *New Republic*'s nomination for the most boring news headline ever), but rather a referendum in the province of Quebec on whether to declare political independence from the rest of Canada. With 50.6 percent of the electorate voting *non* to independence and 49.4 percent *oui*, we were revealed to be a society on the verge of a nervous breakdown, the political equivalent of the mild-mannered citizen who one day inexplicably goes out on a ledge with a gun and a hostage. Of course, in a so far reassuringly Canadian denouement, we have climbed back in and consented to undergo counseling, a much less dramatic process certain to interest many fewer foreigners. So we return to obscurity until spring 1997, the earliest date at which the separatist government of Quebec says it will hold another referendum (depending, it adds with charming candor, on the state of the polls).

How did we ever get this way? Why would so many otherwise apparently sane people want to leave a country that the United Nations consistently places at the top of its ranking (compiled for what reason only God and UN bureaucrats know) of successful societies?

The proximate cause of Canada's current difficulties is a fifteen-year struggle over our constitution, but the elaborate and enervating debates we have had over amending formulas, "notwithstanding clauses," and division of powers have been shadow struggles. The fundamental problem, it seems to me, is one of respect. French-speaking ("francophone") Canadians, most of whom live in Quebec, want respect, both self-respect and respect from others. The question they are gradually working through is whether, in a world of nation-states, it is possible to enjoy sufficient respect without also *being* a nation-state. Fashion has it that in a "globalized" world, nation-statehood is not all it used to be—though if this were as self-evident as the management gurus make it sound, fewer peoples would aspire to the status.

Respect from the rest of the world and from the rest of Canada is only a part of the story, however. There is also the problem of respect within Que-

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bec itself. The rallying cry of the secularizing "Quiet Revolution," whose kickoff is generally dated at 1960, was "*maîtres chez nous*" (masters in our own home). The polls show that French-speaking Quebecers are still concerned about whether in fact they enjoy such mastery, and, in particular, whether they enjoy it in the city of Montreal.

FOR THE first hundred years following the Conquest of 1759, Montreal was a majority-English city. Although both migration from the countryside and "*la revanche des berceaux*" (the revenge of the cradles) eventually made it majority-French, for a time at least the English retained a certain hauteur. One of the icons of today's separatist movement is the mythic unilingual English sales clerk at the Montreal outlet of Eaton's, the Canadian department-store chain, who refused to speak French, apparently to hundreds of thousands of customers, and reportedly even told some of them to "speak white." Enough French-Canadians have reported being on the receiving end of such traumatizing invective that there can be no doubt it happened, possibly frequently.

There is also no doubt that Montreal's business class was predominantly English; in 1961 unilingual francophone Montrealers earned a third less than unilingual anglophones, who also earned more than bilingual Montrealers. Anglophones argued, not entirely without reason, that this mainly reflected differences in education; if a majority-French province provided its citizens with insufficient schooling, whose fault was that? The English were not wholly blameless, however. A colleague of mine at McGill recalls his aunt saying in the 1950's that the tony Mount Royal Club was perfectly willing to admit French-speaking members "so long as they were toilet-trained."

But all this has now gone the way of segregated lunch counters in the South. With the rise to power in the provincial assembly of the separatist Parti Québecois in 1976, and the passage in the following year of Bill 101, French was made the only official language of Quebec. The law regulated the language of work in large firms, of education, and of commercial signs (which must be in French only—compelling, among other peculiar things, English bookstores to provide section titles exclusively in French). Whether because of Bill 101 itself or the election of a separatist government, the result was English flight: between 1976 and 1981, the rate of emigration from English Quebec was twice that from Northern Ireland, an exodus thought by most economists to have contributed to a long-term sag in Montreal's economy.

Law, emigration, and generational turnover have also combined over the last three decades to produce a dramatic change in social conventions. In Montreal, store clerks and telephone operators now invariably begin an exchange with "*Bonjour*" and continue in French if French is what they get in reply. There may be a touch of fear at work here, of course, for one never knows if an ordinary customer may actually be a member of the province's infamous language police, but the almost universal convention, even outside commerce, is that French is the language in which conversations between strangers must begin, and it is not uncommon to see anglophone strangers continuing on in French, neither willing to cede one-upsmanship.

Relative economic positions have also shifted greatly over the last three decades. Whether because of anglophone flight, a rapid upgrading of francophone "human capital," or both, unilingual anglophones have replaced unilingual francophones at the bottom of Montreal's earnings ladder. This has had bizarre results: before last fall's referendum, when the government was still hoping to attract pro-separatist votes among Montreal's English-speakers and immigrants, it announced an inquiry into possible discrimination against non-francophones in the province's civil service.

In short, the laws of the 1970's have settled power relations in the province. Examining the data, a stranger from afar—the average American, say—would likely conclude that although the means used to achieve their ascendancy have not always been gentle the French are now very much what they aimed to become: masters in their own home.

But while the facts of life in Quebec have clearly changed, opinion surveys indicate that old conceptions and feelings die hard. Thus, in 1995 the percentage of francophones professing the belief that their culture and way of life were in great danger of disappearing remained exactly what it was a quarter-century earlier—before the language laws, before the Parti Québecois, before the English exodus. In Saguenay-Lac St. Jean, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence, the 1991 census showed virtually no English-speakers; the region is 98.8 percent French, and the only conceivable linguistic threat comes from U.S. satellite-TV signals. Yet in October's referendum this region voted 70 percent for separation.

IF CIVILIZATION really is a thin veneer, as the usual redundancy has it, Canadian civilization must also sport more than a few coats of varnish.

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We repeatedly deal with the deepest, most disruptive questions a country can ask itself, and generally remain polite while doing so. This was confirmed to me once again when I spent the day of the referendum helping out the *non* committee in the working-class, 77.4-percent-French-speaking district of Gouin in the east end of Montreal, which ended up voting for independence by 58 to 42 percent.

I am a walking stereotype: born on the mainly anglophone "West Island," wife from Toronto, job at English-speaking McGill University, passable but accented French. This circumstance was foremost in my mind as I drove east to Gouin, where, after asking my name, the francophone woman in charge cheerily deflated me by inquiring, in English, if I was from Westmount, the legendary Wasp bastion and still, despite all the changes, a convenient vernacular shorthand for what the French like least about the English. "*Non, Madame, Montréal Ouest*," I replied proudly in my best Québecois accent. I did recognize, however, a number of other volunteers in the crowded storefront as genuine Westmounters, all carrying street maps, as I did.

For most of the day my job in Gouin was to ferry volunteers to polling stations to replace *non*-side poll-watchers, or "scrutineers," who had to be driven to their own neighborhoods to vote. Scrutineers, who were paid $100C ($73 U.S.) for a twelve-hour day, sat in groups of four, two from each side, crossing voters off the list as they voted, noting who was left so their respective committees could phone likely sympathizers, and generally ensuring proper procedures were followed. After a five-minute lesson, I spent the lunch hour in a school gymnasium standing in for a fellow scrutineer.

My separatist tablemates were Alain, a cheerful young student with a brush-cut, a black T-shirt, and an earring, and Bernard, a sullen type, in his thirties, with sallow skin and bags under his eyes, wearing a worn cardigan with his shirttail hanging out—the epitome, incarnate, of every anglophone's imagined separatist. If God is a Separatist, someone like Bernard will be His gatekeeper. He was the secretary for our table, and when I arrived he inspected my credentials skeptically. My fellow *non*-supporter was an older man named Frank, whose last name was Italian.

We all chatted, more or less amiably. Frank, who was from the immediate neighborhood, gave us the history of the school, the community, and even the gym, which had recently been refurbished (and was much better equipped than the school gym in my own upper-middle-class neighborhood). Alain helpfully instructed me in the finer points of filling out my form and for a while we all made a game of who could find a voter's address most quickly. Most of the voters I checked off were young and lived on Rue St. Denis, the cultural heart of French Montreal, and most of them undoubtedly voted *oui*.

It was all done in French, it was all very civil, and it was also freakishly surreal. As we chatted, the people whose ballots we were processing were deciding whether to break up the country and rend the social fabric of our city and province. Of course, we did not broach politics. Strangers almost never do in Quebec. The fault lines are too deep.

In the weeks following the vote the mood soured considerably. This was less because of the result, a Solomonic if ultimately unsatisfactory standoff which gave each side cause for both celebration and disappointment, than because of the referendum's ugly political finale. After the votes were counted and the tally announced, our separatist Premier, Jacques Parizeau, extemporized a venomous speech in which he blamed the loss on "money and the ethnic vote. . . . Three-fifths of us, of what we are"—meaning francophones—"voted yes. It wasn't quite enough, but very soon, it will be enough. We'll get our country." Less than 24 hours later, at the press conference in which he announced he would step down by the end of the year, Parizeau admitted that while his words the evening before may have been too strong, he was merely describing the facts. He pointedly did not apologize.

Parizeau was correct in asserting that the 18 percent of the population that does not list itself as French-speaking had voted massively *non*, thus offsetting an almost 60-percent *oui* vote among francophones. But the Premier's language had been much more than a recitation of political facts: it confirmed with repugnant clarity what most federalists and non-separatists have always believed—that, as the novelist Mordechai Richler has put it, when separatists say "*le Québec aux Québecois*" (Quebec for the Quebecers), they do not mean people named MacGregor or Schwartz.

Parizeau's comments were roundly condemned—by non-francophones, obviously, but also by francophones and even by francophone separatists. These last had special reason to be angry with their movement's leader, who had singlehandedly undermined their lengthy, elaborate, and in some cases genuine attempts to persuade the world they are interested not in ethnic nationalism

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but in "civic" or "geographic" nationalism. Of course, geographic nationalism—nationalism for rocks and trees—is itself a bizarre idea. If one were feeling nationalistic about terrain, why not include the Rockies, the prairies, and the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and emote over the vision of this wondrous Canada that extends "from sea to sea to sea" (the inclusion of the third sea, the Arctic Ocean, being a now-compulsory piece of political correctness, to show proper deference to the Inuit)? Needless to say, the only possible reason for focusing one's nationalism on the particular piece of territory that is Quebec is that it is the home of the French-speaking Quebecers.

THE REFERENDUM and its revealing aftermath have to a large measure succeeded in doing what the language laws and all the rest had not quite managed to do: poison public life here. French Quebecers, themselves divided along political lines, are both embarrassed by and resentful of the charges of racism leveled against them by nonfrancophone Quebecers and Canadians outside the province. As for the minorities, English and otherwise, they are even more deeply alienated from the separatist government than ever before. Among the English, a common topic of conversation has become whether to leave or not—and also how great a loss we will take on our houses if we do.

Those of us who have stayed through the many long years of tumultuous debate are obviously attached to our city and its bicultural character, but we also fear that if the tie with Canada should be cut, policies that discriminate both officially and unofficially in favor of the French will become even more common than they already are. Separatist francophones clearly aim to acquire more political power, and presumably the only point in acquiring power is to use it. So there is a strong temptation to get out while the real-estate market is still relatively good. As yet my street is free of "*à-vendre*" signs, but a trickle of sales may readily turn into a flood.

The end of Canada as we have known it would not merely be disruptive for the several hundred thousand of us who would have to choose between our country and the city we love. It would also spell the end of something else. Canadians searching for a national purpose as inspiring as their southern neighbor's have often thought ours was to show the world that tolerance could be made to work, that different ethnic and even language groups could get along. Now here we are, in our undemonstrative Canadian way, contemplating linguistic and political apartheid. It would be a sad way to become famous.

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OBSERVATIONS

Are American Jews Still Liberal?

Earl Raab

AMERICAN POLITICS has been steadily taking a more conservative turn. Have American Jews been carried along, or have they remained largely fixed in their liberal cast?

Certainly there is no shortage of evidence showing that Jews have retained all their traditional allegiances. The most telling indicator, from exit polls in national elections, is that they continue to vote in overwhelming numbers for the Democratic party. In the eight most recent congressional elections, according to a *New York Times* analysis, an average of 74 percent of Jewish voters pulled the lever for Democratic candidates. (The corresponding figure for the electorate at large was 53 percent.) The disparity was even more pronounced in the watershed November 1994 congressional elections that for the first time in decades brought both houses of Congress under Republican control.

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To be sure, the voting picture is somewhat more diffuse than this. In every presidential election since 1972, the Democratic party has consistently received the support of well over half of Jewish voters, but within that range the numbers have fluctuated, depending on particular candidates and particular issues. In recent years, moreover, observers have detected signs of movement within certain Jewish subgroups—the religiously observant tend to vote Republican in higher numbers than do secular Jews, for example, and the same goes for younger Jews as opposed to older Jews. Still, these are only minor variations on a major theme.

Yet what Jews have been doing at the ballot box is itself only part of a story that has been growing more complex. Specifically, when we look not at Jewish voting behavior but at Jewish opinion, a more nuanced picture begins to manifest itself. One dramatic recent instance of this is a 1995 study of Jews living in Northern California, one of the most politically liberal regions in the United States. The respondents to this survey, which was commissioned by the local Jewish Community Relations Council, were a random sampling of 900 men and women who contribute to the Jewish Federation of San Francisco and its affiliated branches. What the survey reveals is the existence of a split within American Jewry—so far partial and tentative, but perhaps indicative of things to come.

THE SAN FRANCISCO-AREA survey asked respondents to characterize their own political orientation. Unremarkably enough, a mere 10 percent described themselves as "conservative," while 41 percent chose "liberal," and the remaining 43 percent opted for "moderate." It is the last-named who turn out to be the most interesting. Whereas both liberals and conservatives express opinions largely in correspondence with their political self-designations, on at least some issues the moderates hold views that place them far more deeply in the conservative than in the liberal camp.

Consider, for example, attitudes toward the size of government, an issue that serves as something of a polarizing compass on the Left-

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Right scale of American politics. Predictably, only 24 percent of liberals in the San Francisco survey express a preference for reducing the size of government, as opposed to 88 percent of conservatives. But the moderates, it turns out, are solidly on the conservative side, with 72 percent in favor of scaling back government.

The same pattern appears with respect to crime. Concerning "three-strikes-and-you're-out" laws for repeat felons, fewer than half the liberals are in favor, as against 92 percent of conservatives—*and* approximately three-quarters of the moderates. Even where conservatives and moderates diverge, as they do on the death penalty, more moderates side with the conservatives than with the liberals. This means that on most law-and-order issues, the majority of Jews usually end up on the conservative side.

Similar findings emerge in other areas. A majority of respondents agree, for example, that affirmative action "has gone too far" and are opposed to "preferential treatment" (although, like most Americans, they support "outreach" programs). When it comes to such contested issues as welfare reform and environmental protection (the latter especially sensitive in California), there is no such majority, but the conservative position still wins hefty minorities of 30 to 40 percent.

OF COURSE that is far from the whole picture. In fact, on another and arguably more salient set of social issues the pattern is dramatically reversed. These are the issues traditionally perceived as affecting the security and the status of American Jews, and they include anti-Semitism, immigration, church-state relations, and the question of Christian domination. Here, liberals, moderates, and even conservatives are remarkably close.

For example, 69 percent of liberals *and* 68 percent of moderates in the San Francisco-area survey believe that anti-Semitism remains a serious problem in the United States; what is more, 60 percent of conservatives concur. When it comes to illegal immigration, a larger difference exists between liberals and conservatives, but the moderates lean toward the liberal position. Although a voucher program that provided government assistance to private religious schools would help many Jewish parents enroll their children in Jewish schools, among moderates and liberals approximately four-fifths oppose such government aid, as do approximately half of even the self-styled conservatives. On these issues, in short, the tendency is to fall heavily on the liberal side.

Particularly striking is that about nine-tenths of liberals, three-quarters of moderates, and two-thirds of conservatives in the survey express alarm over the role of evangelical Christians in politics. Much of the intensity of Jewish opinion on this issue undoubtedly stems from fear of anti-Semitism, a fear that persists despite the fact that it rests partly on a fallacy. Although Jews have regularly rated Christian fundamentalists as the American group most inimical to them, in one of the most comprehensive studies of recent years* no discernible difference on the standard index of anti-Semitic beliefs was noted between fundamentalists and other Christians (or, for that matter, between Democrats and Republicans). But Jews are also actuated by the publicized remarks of some fundamentalist leaders and the political figures who cater to them (such as Patrick J. Buchanan, who recently commented to the Christian Coalition that "we have God's own word on how America can be healed again"). Even nonsecular Jews tend to see such remarks through the prism of their security-based concerns about sectarianism and "Christianization."

Such concerns are mirrored as well in the high percentages of Jews registering "pro-choice" attitudes. In the San Francisco-area study, over 90 percent voiced approval of the proposition that "Women should be able to have abortions without restriction," with little difference among liberals, moderates, and conservatives. (Oddly, the survey included no question about homosexuality.) A generally permissive attitude toward sexual matters undoubtedly accounts for some of this overwhelming result, but it would be a mistake to underrate the part played by concern about attempts on the part of Christian fundamentalists to impose a religious cast on American society and government policies.

IF, THEN, the question is why Jews vote Democratic, the active and visible presence of Christian fundamentalists within the Republican party is surely one factor. Nor is it the only one. Lurking behind the particular objections Jews may have to this or that aspect of the conservative program is the history of the Republican party itself. In the first half of this century, the party was resolutely nativist and anti-immigrant. Then, as Nazi Germany threatened the peace and security of the world, the party held fast to its isolationist stance, which at the margins was not untainted by anti-Semitism. The American Jewish electorate appears to have a long memory for such things.

Over time, perhaps, this may change, in response not only to the vast transformations that have taken place among Republicans in the intervening decades but also to the increasingly visible rift between the Democratic party's redistributionist inclinations and the interests of the Jews as one of America's most affluent and successful groups. For the moment, though, security issues—rightly or wrong-

*The study, conducted for the Anti-Defamation League by the polling firm of Marttila & Kiley, was published in November 1992.

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ly perceived—still seem to prevail for many Jews over pocketbook interests; the more affluent respondents in the San Francisco-area survey do not differ significantly in their attitudes from the less affluent.

And so, if the past is any guide, there will continue to be much truth in the notion that if you scratch an American Jew, you will find a Democratic voter. The complicating news today is that if you scratch somewhat deeper, you will not always find a liberal.

Reading Jurors' Minds

James Q. Wilson

THE PUBLIC worries that criminal trials, especially those involving murderers, have been hamstrung by the introduction of a number of implausible new legal stratagems. These range from the so-called Twinkie defense—the assertion that excessive ingestion of junk food diminishes judgment—to the claim advanced by lawyers for Eric and Lyle Menendez (with the effect of producing a hung jury in their first trial) that fear of sexual abuse is sufficient to reduce the charge for killing one's parents, to arguments that a woman may shoot a brutal husband even when he is asleep.

Americans have never been entirely comfortable with the not-guilty-by-reason-of-insanity verdict pronounced upon John Hinckley after he shot President Ronald Reagan in 1981; that discomfort has been heightened by what people view as an indefensible effort to extend the narrowly defined legal category of insanity to include various psychological states like temporary insanity, diminished capacity, and a multitude of "syndromes" including premenstrual, postpartum, post-traumatic, and the like. The emergence of these exculpatory psychological concepts suggests to many that essential notions of personal responsibility have been eroded and the courts' stern task of judging behavior has been weakened by the deployment of dubious theories of social causation. Instead of promoting a dispassionate review of objective evidence, our legal system increasingly encourages us to explain criminal conduct on the basis of conflicting theories presented by rival expert witnesses speaking psychobabble.*

Many legal scholars, however, see the matter quite differently. The law reviews are filled with learned and subtle discussions of every novel defense claim considered by the appellate courts. The law professors who read and write these essays are usually inclined to dismiss public anxiety over such legal innovations as unwarranted. The insanity defense, they point out, is rarely raised and is even more rarely successful. Moreover, a person found to be insane may spend more time in an institution than one convicted of murder. The Twinkie defense, though it made for provocative headlines at the time, probably played no role in the conviction of Dan White on manslaughter charges after he shot to death both the mayor and a city supervisor of San Francisco in 1978.

Indeed (the law professors continue), few of the new defenses based upon the mental condition of the defendant have allowed killers to walk away free; at most they have produced verdicts of manslaughter rather than murder, and even this occurs only infrequently. The first trial of the Menendez brothers was an anomaly, not at all representative of what happens in the great majority of homicide prosecutions. To be sure, the battered-woman syndrome has been introduced into many trials of women who killed their husbands, but such killings are also unusual; the syndrome

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*See, for example, "Getting Away With Murder" by Walter Berns, COMMENTARY, April 1994.

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rarely leads to any outcome more questionable than a lenient sentence based on a recognition of grave prior brutality.

Clearly, there is a gap between what the public and what the law professors believe. Although there is merit on both sides, I think the public one should dominate. But, paradoxically, the public itself is of two minds.

Studies of public opinion show that the average citizen wants the system to be tough on criminals by imposing harsher sentences. Studies of juries, by contrast, suggest that the average juror aims to do justice by understanding the defendant and by devising a verdict that will take into account his subjective state and the circumstances of his offense. Thus, two-thirds of adults questioned in Illinois expressed the belief that judges were too lenient in sentencing convicted burglars; but when asked to design an appropriate sentence, most of these same people recommended penalties that were even less severe than the minimum sentence a judge could have imposed. In their classic study, *The American Jury* (1966), Harry Kalven and Hans Zeisel compared the decisions of juries with the views of judges familiar with the facts of each case. Though the two usually agreed, in those instances where they disagreed the jury was much more likely than the judge to have favored acquittal.

NORMAN J. FINKEL, a professor of psychology at Georgetown University, begins his new study, *Commonsense Justice: Jurors' Notions of the Law*,* by reviewing these and other examples of the tension between what people say in their capacity as citizens and what they do in their capacity as jurors. His data come from experiments in which people have been asked to pretend to be jurors and to react to the scenario of a criminal case.

That there are obviously limitations to this method is something Finkel carefully acknowledges. Make-believe juries are a bit unrealistic: while some "jurors" in these studies hear evidence read aloud by others, meet to discuss cases, and try hard to duplicate what a real jury goes through, others merely stare at a written transcript. Still, whether or not such studies produce accurate results, their central finding is a compelling one: jurors are interested in explanations. They seek, in Finkel's words, to "account for the facts by inferring causal and intentional links among particular facts."

In one experiment, for example, Finkel asked mock jurors to sentence a man who had been arrested for writing a $100 check against a nonexistent bank account. To the stock of information the jurors knew about the defendant, Finkel then added successive facts, telling them ultimately that the man had previously been convicted of 7 other crimes. As the jury was exposed to such incriminating information, the average sentence it imposed rose from 10 months to 30 years. But then, in the last stages of the experiment, the jury heard either a psychiatrist speaking on behalf of the defendant—which made the sentence fall from 30 to 5 years—or both a psychiatrist testifying for the defendant and a prosecutor testifying on the dangers of recidivism—which brought the sentence down to a level of about 15 years. In either case, only a small percentage of the jurors sentenced the defendant to life imprisonment without parole, the requirement of the state from which the case had been drawn.

In a similar study conducted by Finkel, mock jurors were asked to pass judgment on a woman charged with killing her abusive husband, but the facts were altered as they were presented to different groups of volunteers. To some, the husband was described as having advanced on his wife with a weapon. Others were told he had gone to sleep after threatening that as soon as he awoke she would get "what she deserved." Not surprisingly, four out of every five mock jurors voted to acquit when the woman shot her husband as he advanced on her menacingly. But almost half also voted to acquit even when she killed him while he was asleep.

THESE TWO cases, and others like them in the book, rest comfortably with what I take Finkel's own views to be. He is a critic of mandatory life imprisonment for repeat offenders, and so he welcomes the fact that jurors worry about the degree of guilt of a repeat felon in a state with mandatory life-sentence laws. He is concerned about the problem of battered women, and so he embraces the fact that half of the mock jurors voted to acquit a woman who shot her abusive husband while he was asleep. For Finkel, what the defendant intended is central, and he stresses the great importance of a jury's desire to achieve a proportionality that will reconcile a defendant's actions with his motives and circumstances.

Finkel's argument runs against the famous and, to my mind, still valid lessons of Oliver Wendell Holmes, who tried to show, in *The Common Law* (1881) and elsewhere, that subjectivism—that is, seeing the world through the eyes of the defendant—is wrong. A jury has a natural inclination to judge the person as well as the act; it is out of a desire to check this inclination that the written law strives to draw a bright line between actions and motives. Strictly speaking, the motive for a crime is irrelevant. It is as wrong to steal in order to buy cocaine as it is to steal to give to the Salvation Army. A man who kills his wife is guilty of murder whether he does so to obtain her insurance or to end her painful disease.

In practice, of course, motives are rarely irrelevant. Prosecutors

*Harvard University Press, 400 pp., $39.95.

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refer to motives in deciding what charges to bring, and juries refer to them in deciding what penalty to impose. Thus, written law and human sentiments are partially at war one with another. But the war ought not end with the surrender of one side. The law draws a clear line; that same line reflects, or ought to reflect, the moral sentiments that people bring to judging crime. As Finkel rightly points out, a pure commitment to objectivity—which would lead to the same punishment being meted out to people who killed from very different motives—risks stripping the law of its moorings in widely shared standards of justice. But forsaking objective law in favor of the shared moral dispositions of people acting as jurors risks abandoning the neutral principles of the law, thus punishing—or, alternatively, excusing—people for their thoughts, motives, and character, and weakening the social-control features of the law by telling would-be offenders that they can get away with crime if they come up with good stories.

TO GRASP what is at stake here, consider the possibility that Finkel had undertaken his research in, say, Mississippi in the 1920's. There, I suspect, studies would have shown white jurors treating whites and blacks very differently, excusing the former if they killed the latter but severely punishing the latter if they killed the former. Under such circumstances, Finkel's commitment to proportionality between intention and punishment might well have taken a different turn, leading him to wonder whether such disparate outcomes based upon race should be tolerated. Would not a book written by him then have given greater weight to the principles of neutral law and objective standards of culpability than to moral sentiments?

In short, we need to keep in mind these two broad functions of the law: assessing individual actions and affirming shared social understandings. I agree with Finkel that the average citizen contemplating a new law and the average juror judging a particular application of that law will often reach very different conclusions. But tax burdens are also assessed very differently by the citizen as voter and the same citizen as taxpayer, and so is Medicare by the citizen as observer and the same citizen as participant. We want the public to be of two minds about certain things, and not the least of these is justice.

This is certainly true with respect to the insanity defense. Consider the M'Naghten rule, which states that a person is legally insane if by a "defect of reason" he is unable to "know the nature and quality of his act" or, if he does know these things, he does not know that what he did "was wrong." I happen to like this formulation for all the reasons that the attorney Joseph Livermore and the psychologist Paul Meehl offered nearly 30 years ago. It is a very good rule because it recognizes insanity as a defense, links it to the character of practical reasoning, and clearly implies (and this is how I think most juries interpret it) that you are sane unless you are gripped by hallucinations or delusions.

Finkel, however, distrusts the M'Naghten rule because it admits of no shade of intermediate status: it asks jurors to imagine a person who is either entirely equipped with right reason or entirely deficient in it. At one level he is right to suggest that such a sharp distinction makes no sense: people vary in the strength of their moral faculties, with some being weaker and others hardier. But at another level it makes perfectly good sense: one either hallucinates and suffers from delusions or one does not. If we want the criminal-justice system to reflect all the gradations developed by social science, we could ask it to array defendants along a continuum ranging from obviously insane to clearly sane. But that is not what we want or need from the system; we want it to defend justice by holding everybody to a high standard of personal conduct, while allowing a jury to find someone not guilty by giving it the power to apply a narrow test of insanity.

Finkel proposes a different test, one more closely suited to how jurors like to think. He wants them to ask, in order, the following questions: did the defendant's actions cause harm to befall the victim? If yes, then was the defendant suffering from a "disability of the mind"? If yes, then what was the degree of mental disability: partial or total? And if partial, was the defendant himself to blame (for example, by abusing alcohol or drugs) for bringing it about?

Although Finkel may well be correct that this is how jurors want to think, he does not make a convincing argument that this is how we should let them think. My own view is that considerations of partial mental disability are an opening for jurors to place themselves so fully in the defendant's shoes that they will forgive defendants they like and punish those they dislike.

BEING A juror is a difficult task, but making it easier can be a mistake. The explanation-hungry, story-seeking, context-searching temperament of a juror confronting a case must be held sharply in bounds by the skeptical, judgment-prone, verdict-seeking attitude of a nonjuror, an ordinary citizen, facing the same case.

American courts have of late been somewhat quick to embrace social science at the expense of law. It is a tendency that ought to be resisted. Finkel's book is a useful volume for a social scientist. I hope lawyers do not read it.

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Whatever Happened to Arthur Rubinstein

Terry Teachout

ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN was born in 1887 and died in 1982, six years after making his last recordings for RCA and giving his farewell concert at London's Wigmore Hall. He played in public for eight decades, marking perhaps the longest career of any performing musician. Throughout the second half of that career, he was, after Vladimir Horowitz, the most famous pianist in the world. And in old age he added considerably to his fame by appearing on TV and publishing two chatty volumes of reminiscence, *My Young Years* (1972) and *My Many Years* (1980); the first, in an unprecedented honor for a classical musician, was chosen as a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club.

Rubinstein was more than just a crowd-pleasing virtuoso with a knack for self-promotion. He was admired by some of the most thoughtful listeners of his time. In 1949, the distinguished composer and critic Virgil Thomson reviewed a Rubinstein recital in extravagant terms:

> Others may be regularly more flashy, though few can dazzle so dependably; and none can match him for power and refinement. He plays very loudly and very beautifully, very softly and thoroughly clean, straightforwardly, elegantly and with a care for both the amenities of musical discourse and the clear transmission of musical thought. He is a master pianist and a master musician. There has not been his like since [Ferruccio] Busoni [1866-1924].

But today, Arthur Rubinstein is, if not completely forgotten, certainly not well remembered, save by those old enough to have heard him in concert. Although many of his records remain available fourteen years after his death, they have failed to seize the attention of a new generation of music-lovers captivated by the legendary pianists of the prewar (and pre-Horowitz) era: Sergei Rachmaninoff, Josef Hofmann, Benno Moiseiwitsch, Artur Schnabel, Edwin Fischer, Percy Grainger, Alfred Cortot. Next to these, Rubinstein is strictly an also-ran.

WHAT CAUSED so beloved an artist to vanish so quickly from the collective consciousness of the musical world? In trying to answer this question we are immeasurably aided by Harvey Sachs's *Rubinstein: A Life*,[1] a biography written with the full cooperation of the Rubinstein family as well as of Annabelle Whitestone (now Lady Weidenfeld), with whom Rubinstein was romantically involved during the last twelve years of his life. Sachs is an ex-conductor turned music historian whose previous books include the standard biography of Arturo Toscanini and an important study of music in Fascist Italy. In *Rubinstein: A Life*, he has successfully untangled the errors of fact, sins of omission, and self-contradictions with which the pianist's memoirs are riddled; though he writes as an admirer, he also deals honestly with his subject's faults, both moral and artistic. The result is one of the finest musical biographies to be published in recent memory, a book that is at once readable and responsible.

Much of its readability, of course, is due to the fact that Arthur Rubinstein led a life that was unusually eventful, even by the standards of a world-famous musician. The eldest son of a cloth manufacturer from the large Jewish community of Lodz, Poland, Rubinstein began playing the piano before the age of three. At four, he performed for Joseph Joachim, the great 19th-century German violinist, who subsequently took charge of his artistic development; at ten, he went to Berlin to study piano. He made his professional debut with the Berlin Philharmonic at the age of thirteen; four years later, he moved to Paris and launched his career in earnest.

CASUAL READERS of *My Young Years* and *My Many Years* may be forgiven for thinking that Rubinstein's life from his arrival in Paris in 1904 to his marriage in 1932 was one long party, with concerts interspersed. But in fact Rubinstein's young years were also a time of serious artistic endeavor. He performed throughout Europe and the Americas, winning partic-

TERRY TEACHOUT *is* COMMENTARY*'s music critic. His latest book,* A Second Mencken Chrestomathy, *is out in paperback from Vintage.*

[1]Grove Press, 525 pp., $27.50.

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ular success in Spain and South America; he was closely associated with several prominent composers whose piano music he introduced, including Igor Stravinsky, Manuel de Falla, Heitor Villa-Lobos, and Karol Szymanowski. And at the end of the 20's he began to make records for HMV and, later, RCA, eventually recording virtually all of his working repertoire.

As Sachs tells it, however, Rubinstein himself was deeply ambivalent about the course of his youthful career, torn between his taste for high living and his commitment to music. A natural pianist with a big (though not transcendental) technique, he practiced as little as possible, learning new pieces quickly and without sufficient attention to textual detail, relying on his personal charm to conceal the lack of finish in his playing. As a result, he failed to break into the front ranks of the piano virtuosos of the early 20th century, and prior to the mid-30's his career, though impressive by ordinary standards, was nothing like what had been predicted for him by his earliest critics.

Sachs suggests, to my mind convincingly, that Rubinstein's failure fully to realize his early potential was related to his unsettled feelings about German musical culture. On the one hand, his artistic personality showed unmistakable signs of its German training, including a sound, unshowy technique, a passion for the music of Mozart, Schubert, and Brahms, and an interest in chamber music unusual among virtuoso pianists of his generation.[2] On the other hand, Rubinstein did not play in Germany after 1914, and throughout his life he expressed contempt for such *echt*-German pianists as Schnabel and Fischer. It seems probable that Rubinstein's inability to break into the first tier left him with something of an inferiority complex when it came to German music and musicians, and that this was one of the reasons he chose not to play for German audiences between the wars.

By his own account, Rubinstein's attitude toward his playing changed after his marriage: "I didn't want my kids to grow up thinking of their father as either a second-string pianist or a has-been." Embarrassed by the technical sloppiness of his earliest recordings, he began in the summer of 1934 to restudy his entire repertoire. "I buckled down to work—six hours, eight hours, nine hours a day," he recalled in 1958. "And a strange thing happened. . . . I'd begun to discover new meanings, new qualities, new possibilities in music that I'd been playing regularly for more than 30 years."

The effects of this period of study were immediately apparent. The complete sets of Chopin mazurkas, nocturnes, and polonaises that established Rubinstein's reputation as a Chopin specialist were all recorded after the summer of 1934, and they are technically far more exact than his earlier recordings. When he began playing regularly in the United States in 1937, he finally won recognition as one of the world's outstanding piano virtuosos. Rubinstein spent World War II in this country; by the time the war was over, his popularity with American audiences was solidly established, and he retained it for the rest of his life.

World War II marked another line of demarcation in Rubinstein's life. Most of his family died in the Holocaust, and his Paris home was looted during the German occupation. Although from adolescence onward he had been devoid of religious belief, and indifferent toward Judaism, now he not only continued to refuse to play in Germany but chose not to work with artists who, like the conductor Herbert von Karajan, had had Nazi ties. In 1949, Rubinstein and other prominent musicians (including Horowitz and Heifetz) announced that they would not appear with the Chicago Symphony if it engaged the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, who had remained in Germany during the war. "I refuse," he wrote in a letter to the orchestra's board of directors,

> to be associated with anyone who sympathized with Hitler, Goering, or Goebbels. Had Furtwängler been a good democrat, he would have turned his back on Germany. . . . It is said that Furtwängler rescued some people from the Nazis' clutches. This has not been confirmed. At present, he is seeking dollars and prestige in America, and he deserves neither.[3]

While the Holocaust failed to turn Rubinstein into an observant Jew, it clearly played a significant part in his fervent support of the state of Israel—and, later, of Menachem Begin and the Likud party. Most musicians, Jewish and otherwise, tend in any given political circumstance to hew to the leftmost position available, and so this latter affiliation astonished and dismayed many of Rubinstein's colleagues. But the pianist, undeterred, robustly stuck to his guns to the very end of his life, once going so far as to attack Yehudi Menuhin in public for (as Sachs puts it) "the violinist's soft stand vis-à-vis UNESCO's censure of Israel." (Rubinstein characterized Menuhin's attitude toward Israel as "un-Jewish.")

Sachs also discusses numerous other personal matters of interest,

[2] Several of Rubinstein's most memorable recordings are of chamber music, among them a 1937 performance with Jascha Heifetz of the Franck Violin Sonata (Biddulph LAB 025) and a famous series of recordings made in 1941 with Heifetz and the cellist Emanuel Feuermann, including the Beethoven "Archduke" and Schubert B-Flat Trios (RCA 09026-60926-2) and the Brahms B-Major Trio (Biddulph LAB 086).

[3] For a full discussion of this very complicated case, see Samuel Lipman's "Furtwängler and the Nazis" in the March 1993 Commentary.

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most notably Rubinstein's compulsive promiscuity. In his own memoirs the pianist specifically mentions some three dozen women, ranging from countesses to common prostitutes, with whom he had sexual relations prior to his marriage—starting, at the age of fifteen, with his Berlin landlady. And there were plenty of others, both before and after: Rubinstein was first unfaithful to his wife on the afternoon of their wedding, and thereafter his extramarital activities continued without interruption until, at the age of ninety, he left her to live with Annabelle Whitestone.

The pianist Emanuel Ax, one of Rubinstein's greatest admirers, was profoundly disappointed by reading *My Many Years*. "Until then," he told Sachs, "I had idolized Rubinstein—I had wanted to have a life like his. The book changed all that." Many readers of *Rubinstein: A Life* may react similarly.

BUT THERE is another, more important Rubinstein "biography" to be considered, and that is the one that lies in his records.

Most of Rubinstein's prewar recordings for HMV are now available on CD, and the very first one, a version of the Chopin Barcarolle made in 1928, is in certain ways the most revealing musical statement he ever made.[4] Though there is no mistaking the underlying soundness of Rubinstein's technique, this slapdash performance contains not only accidental wrong notes but blatant misreadings of the musical text—startling in a piece Rubinstein referred to on more than one occasion as his favorite work by Chopin.

Just as startling is the absence of a distinctive musical personality. While his performance here is not as "straight" as those he would record after the war—some of the tempos are extremely wayward—it is nonetheless lacking in character. So, indeed, are most of Rubinstein's other prewar recordings, few of which sound the intensely personal note characteristic of golden-age piano virtuosos.

What was true of the young Rubinstein is doubly true of the older, more cautious artist who rerecorded most of his repertoire for RCA after the war. Some of these later discs, especially of his favorite concertos, are musically quite satisfying.[5] But, though beautifully played, even the best ones are rarely *individual*, at least not in the way that a recording by Rachmaninoff or Horowitz is individual.

It is true that Rubinstein was not typical of his generation of pianists. Aside from the fact that his training was exclusively German, his musical tastes, as Sachs points out, were "thoroughly modern." He disliked the idiosyncratic, even eccentric styles of pianists like Horowitz, Cortot, Ignace Jan Paderewski, and Leopold Godowsky (though he did admire Rachmaninoff). His own preference, especially in the music of Chopin, was for a simpler, less inflected style of playing, which he believed truer to Chopin's spirit than the prevailing approach of the day.

Sachs, who admires this style, describes it in terms intended to suggest its continuity with the German school:

> Rubinstein's playing was Romantic, but it did not have the self-absorbed and self-indulgent characteristics that this adjective has also come to represent. In this sense, although in few others, he was closer to his German-school contemporaries Schnabel, Fischer, and [Wilhelm] Kempff than to such Eastern European contemporaries (albeit somewhat older contemporaries) as Rachmaninoff and Hofmann, let alone to Horowitz, who was seventeen years younger than Rubinstein but stylistically closer to the old-timers. . . . His playing had strong individual character, but his goal was not to do "something different" at any cost.

But by comparison with Rachmaninoff and Hofmann—not to mention Schnabel and Fischer, both of whom were in their own ways decidedly eccentric artists—Rubinstein's straightforward approach is likely to strike present-day listeners as largely devoid of the "strong individual character" Sachs detects. And this is a great paradox in a pianist who, by his own admission, got by on charm throughout the first half of his career, and who consistently came across in concert as a pianist of flamboyance and panache.

WHETHER OR not Rubinstein's recordings tell a truer tale than contemporary accounts of his playing cannot be settled by those (like me) who did not see him perform live.[6] In his case as in others, however, records are now all we have, and in the end, they must be taken at face value—even though the "evidence" they present not infrequently contradicts the impressions a living artist makes on a living audience. For better or for

[4] The performance is available on EMI ZDHC 7 64697 2, a three-disc set which also contains Rubinstein's prewar recordings of the complete mazurkas, polonaises, and scherzos of Chopin. Also of interest is *Rubinstein Fireworks* (Grammofono 2000 AB 78539), featuring pre-1934 recordings of shorter pieces by Albeniz, Brahms, Chopin, Debussy, Falla, Ravel, and Schubert.

[5] Rubinstein's 1958 recordings of the Saint-Saens G-Minor Concerto and the Franck Symphonic Variations, accompanied by Alfred Wallenstein and the Symphony of the Air, are especially vivid specimens of his postwar playing (RCA 09026-61496-2). And RCA 60046-2-RG contains superb performances of two works by composers Rubinstein knew well, Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and Szymanowski's *Symphonie Concertante*.

[6] The most readily available visual record of Rubinstein in concert, *The Last Recital for Israel* (RCA 09026-61160-3), is, alas, a very late performance (videotaped in 1975), though it does illustrate "the dignified bearing, the absence of extraneous body movement and facial contortions, [and] the absorption in the music" described by Sachs.

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worse, the only kind of artistic personality that can be captured for posterity by the microphone is the kind whose merits are embodied in the act of musical performance alone: in the recording studio, an artist's stage presence is meaningless. Rubinstein's personality, apparently a function of his physical presence, is simply not a factor in his recordings, which document the playing of a talented pianist of no great individuality. As the saying goes, you had to be there.

Nor is the case of Rubinstein unique. For the most part, the performers of the past who are remembered today are (in the broadest sense of the word) the musical eccentrics, the Rachmaninoffs and Horowitzes and Leopold Stokowskis. It is the "centrics" who have been forgotten. Who now, for example, listens to the recordings of the eminently "centric" soprano Renata Tebaldi, other than those opera buffs who saw her on stage? In the 50's and early 60's, Tebaldi and Maria Callas were the fiercest of rivals. But now that Callas is dead and Tebaldi retired, there is no longer any contest: Callas is a legend, Tebaldi a footnote.

This suggests the possibility that our current canons of good musical taste, forged in the refiner's fire of modernity, may well be unequal to the special demands of the age of mechanical reproduction. When a pianist today plays the Chopin Barcarolle, he is "competing" not only with his contemporaries but with the dozens of other pianists, including Rubinstein, who have recorded the same work since the turn of the 20th century. Such comparisons may be invidious, but they are also inevitable, and they may well account for the growing public interest in those prewar artists for whom romanticism was not a word vaguely suggestive of vulgarity, but a way of life.

The implications for the future of classical music in live performance are as yet unclear, but one thing can already be said with confidence: musicians who, like Arthur Rubinstein, rely on extramusical factors to impress the listening public are doomed to posthumous obscurity. That this may yet lead to a revival of musical individuality—even full-blown romanticism—is merely another reminder that in the postmodern era, all cultural bets are off.

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Books in Review

America at Its Best

Not Without Honor:
The History of American
Anti-Communism
by Richard Gid Powers
Free Press. 554 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
John Earl Haynes

Not Without Honor is a scholarly, start-to-finish account of American anti-Communism. It is also the first book of its kind. Though hundreds of volumes have been devoted to cold-war politics, and a small library could be filled with titles on McCarthyism, until now there has not been a single comprehensive treatment of one of the most important ideological movements in American history.

At fault for this neglect are the universities. Since the 1960's, anti-Communism has been viewed by most academic writers as a species of obscenity: something utterly without redeeming social value. For an untenured historian to deviate from this view has meant risking a career, while for a tenured scholar it has often meant abuse and ostracism by one's professional peers. The net result is that the literature on the subject has been lopsidedly hostile, veering off at the extremes to such judgments as that of the psychohistorian Joel Kovel that anti-Communism is a certifiable mental illness, with deep roots in the American psyche.

Powers, himself a professor of history, did not come to his subject intending to provoke the ire of his colleagues; rather, his views changed in the course of his labors. "I began," he writes, "with the idea that anti-Communism displayed America at its worst, but I came to see in [it] America at its best." Precisely how this is so, Powers chronicles with an impressive abundance of detail. His research is thorough and substantially original, his prose fluent, and his analysis consistently illuminating. This is an exemplary work.

Powers begins by distinguishing two strands of American anti-Communism that developed in reaction to the Bolshevik coup of 1917: Woodrow Wilson's liberal internationalism and what Powers calls "countersubversive anti-Communism." The first strand, from which derive most varieties of liberal anti-Communism, was linked to a foreign policy aimed at isolating the Soviet Union in the hope of extinguishing its revolutionary ardor. Countersubversives, by contrast, were concerned mostly with the threat posed by *domestic* Communist organizations to America's internal affairs, and sought to expose and punish them through the use of patriotic societies, congressional committees, and the FBI.

As Powers's narrative unfolds, many prominent countersubversives emerge in a dismal light. Sometimes ignorant and bullying, they could also be disgracefully tolerant of anti-Semites and conspiratorial nuts who insinuated themselves into their camp. More often, however, they were just plain gullible. Powers tells the sto-

JOHN EARL HAYNES *is the co-author (with Harvey Klehr and Fridrikh Firsov) of* The Secret World of American Communism *(Yale) and author of the forthcoming* Red Scare or Red Menace?: American Communism and Anti-Communism in the Cold War Era *(Ivan R. Dee).*

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ry of Ralph Easley, head of the influential National Civic Federation, who was deeply worried about Communist influence among industrial workers. Taken in by a confidence man, Easley was inveigled into spending much of his own money tracking down trunks of documents said to contain valuable information about the Soviet underground in America. In 1930, he persuaded Congressman Hamilton Fish, chairman of a House investigative committee, to gather police for a raid on a Baltimore produce warehouse where the trunks were supposedly hidden. The derisive press coverage that ensued when it was discovered that there were no documents, only lettuce, did much to discredit the anti-Communist cause.

Ironically, it was the liberals who scored the two most important early victories in the domestic battle against Communism: the ejection of Communists from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the defeat of Henry Wallace's Progressive party in 1948. In describing the former episode, Powers emphasizes especially the role played by Walter Reuther, a socialist who had cooperated with Communists in founding the United Auto Workers (UAW), the CIO's largest union, only to come away with a deep loathing of them. When, during World War II, Communist activists pressured the UAW to replace hourly wages with piecework pay, presumably as a way of boosting war production, Reuther led the charge against the proposal, saying that Communists "don't give a tinker's dam what happens to the American labor movement" and only pushed it because they thought it would "help Russia win the war." The issue helped to elevate Reuther to the presidency of the UAW in 1946, and his subsequent elimination of Communists from his union enabled Philip Murray, the CIO president, to do the same by 1950.

A graver danger than Communist infiltration of the labor movement was posed by Henry Wallace, who had been Vice President during Franklin D. Roosevelt's third term and was very nearly his successor. Not only was Wallace a vocal opponent of the policy of containment (for which Harry Truman, after succeeding Roosevelt in 1945, fired him as Commerce Secretary), but he quietly encouraged the participation of Communists in the third party he organized for his 1948 presidential bid. In response, a number of prominent liberals formed Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), with the aim of preventing Wallace from coopting the progressive wing of the Democratic party.

THE MESSAGE of the ADA was best articulated by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in *The Vital Center* (1949). That landmark book, Powers writes, "carved out a position for anti-Communist liberals between the fellow-traveling progressive Left and the countersubversive anti-Communist Right." Schlesinger argued that fascism and Communism, far from being opposites, were in fact cut from the same cloth, and that free societies had no choice but to wage the cold war against Communism with the same vigor they had brought to the war against Nazism.

As for the existence of an "underground Communist apparatus" in the United States, however, Schlesinger, like many liberals, felt that its extent was much exaggerated. "The performance of the House Committee on Un-American Activities," he wrote, "has shown clearly the dangers to civil freedom of a promiscuous and unprincipled attack on radicalism." Powers is in great sympathy with this position, which is indeed hardly without merit. But it is also too generous to the liberals, and too ungenerous not only to the countersubversives but to the much larger movement of conservative anti-Communism of which they formed only a part.

In fact, though many liberals needed no prompting in their anti-Communism, many more wanted to avoid what was a painfully divisive issue, and confronted it only when their noses were rubbed in the evidence. This certainly was the case when, in 1948, Whittaker Chambers, a one-time member of the Communist underground turned anti-Communist warrior, accused Alger Hiss, a former Assistant Secretary of State and then president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, of having been a Soviet agent. The case had the air of a witch-hunt, pitting a cultivated paladin of the New Deal against coarse and unscrupulous reactionaries. Most liberals would have been glad to see the matter dropped. But Congressman Richard Nixon pursued it doggedly, and eventually Hiss's guilt became too obvious to deny (although some continue to deny it to this day). With the recent opening of Soviet archives it has become abundantly clear that the claims of even the most unsavory countersubversives about the links between American Communists and the Soviet espionage apparatus were substantially true.

IN ADDITION to his two main threads, Powers discusses other anti-Communist forces that contributed to the strength of the overall movement: the anti-Communism of the religiously-minded, particularly Roman Catholics; of socialists, many of them Jewish, who based their hostility to Communism on its rejection of democracy; of Jews eager to refute the Jewish-Bolshevik stereotype; of blacks who viewed the party's emphasis on class as a diversion from race; and of the labor unions for whom Communism was a threat to their autonomy. Then there was, fittingly enough, the Communist movement itself, which Powers calls a "school for anti-Commu-

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nism," and whose graduates—Sidney Hook, Bertram Wolfe, and Max Eastman among them—were perhaps the ablest anti-Communists of all.

Throughout most of its history, the anti-Communist movement enjoyed at least the tacit support of a majority of Americans. Yet this advantage was in large measure offset by its unpopularity among the nation's establishment, and particularly among many of those who set the tone of cultural and intellectual discussion. Here once again Powers assigns blame to the countersubversives, and principally Senator Joseph McCarthy. Their demagoguery, he observes, handed both Communists and the so-called progressive Left an "excuse to shift the . . . controversy from Communism to the excesses of anti-Communism, . . . which was defined as a false and dangerous attack on the civil liberties of all reformers and all Americans." This, as we have seen, was also the burden of Schlesinger's complaint in *The Vital Center*.

Anti-Communism hit its low point in the aftermath of the Vietnam war, which exploded the liberal anti-Communist consensus, and of Watergate, which disgraced its leading conservative exponent. But then, astonishingly, the movement revived in the late 70's and early 80's, and arguably achieved its finest hour. Powers sketches the revival by focusing primarily on three individuals.

The first is Paul Nitze, a leading cold-war thinker and strategist in various administrations, who, through the Committee on the Present Danger, highlighted the need for an American military and diplomatic response to Soviet expansion. The second is Norman Podhoretz, who in his own writings and as editor-in-chief of COMMENTARY rejuvenated the arguments of liberal anti-Communism and powerfully reformulated them in the language of what would become known as neoconservatism. And, above all, there is Ronald Reagan, whose anti-Communist foreign policy, stated crisply in moral terms, did more than any other factor to crack the Soviet empire.

Not Without Honor closes with a mordant comment about the reality with which I began: despite victory in the cold war, anti-Communism has still won little respect in the academy. Instead, Powers observes, most academics continue to write and teach about

> the melodramatic excesses of anti-Communism at its worst and most extreme, the stereotype of the anti-Communist as McCarthyite, militarist, and bigot. . . . Lost [is] the memory of a movement as diverse as the nation itself, reflecting the convictions of nearly every group in America that their own peculiar experience, as well as their identity as Americans, demanded that they reject Communism and come to the aid of those suffering under it abroad.

That is a fair description—and a telling one. It points vividly to the gulf separating America's people from its intellectual elites, and to the moral corruption that afflicts the discipline of history in particular and much of the humanities in general. No one book is going to change this state of affairs, but Powers has made a brave start.

Elder Economics

Aging and Old Age
by Richard Posner
University of Chicago Press. 375 pp. $29.95

Reviewed by
Marc M. Arkin

RICHARD POSNER, chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, has, through the prodigious application of intellect and energy, earned a reputation as one of the finest appellate judges in the country. In addition to his considerable judicial achievements, Posner remains an active presence at the University of Chicago Law School, where he taught from 1969 until President Reagan appointed him to the federal bench in 1981. Along with numerous articles, he has continued to produce a book—and sometimes two—virtually every year for the last decade, traversing fields as diverse as literary theory, philosophy, and biography.

As a scholar, Posner is most closely identified with "law and economics," the intellectual movement he helped to found. At the risk of oversimplification, one may say that this approach entails asking of every legal rule three questions: what will it cost?; who will pay those costs?; and what will be the net result for social efficiency?

The analytical framework of law and economics is also present in Posner's new book, *Aging and Old Age*, where it is supplemented by insights drawn from such varied disciplines as cognitive psychology, philosophy, and evolutionary biology. The result is what Posner terms an "economic psychology" which builds on the basic "human-capital" model of the life cycle customarily employed by economists to describe labor-market behavior, but which, thanks to the addition of multidisciplinary insights, offers a more powerful behavioral model than conventional economic analysis.

As becomes clear from *Aging and Old Age*, Posner believes this "thicker" approach can be used to explain virtually everything about the elderly, from the cluster of traits that characterize them—among which he names parsimony, garrulousness, risk-averseness, law-abidingness, high voter-participation rates, and slow driving—to the trajectory of their careers and their savings and consumption patterns.

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Having elaborated this model of geriatric behavior, Posner next trains his sights on the entire gamut of age-related policy issues, from mandatory retirement and the best allocation of medical research-and-treatment dollars to euthanasia and the merits of physician-assisted suicide. In each case, he examines current institutions and practices and asks whether they meet his criteria of social efficiency.

IN PERHAPS the most persuasively argued portion of this sprawling book, Posner applies traditional economic analysis to legal regimes directly affecting older citizens, including the Employees Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) of 1974 and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967. In the case of the latter, Posner demonstrates how a law intended to protect older workers from discrimination in hiring, being unfairly fired, or being otherwise mistreated on account of age has had a whole series of unintended and perverse consequences.

For one thing, Posner argues, given the nature of the current labor pool, the ADEA tends to protect older white male workers, thus benefiting a group in little need of protection at the expense of more hard-pressed groups: minority and female entrants into the workforce. For another, the ADEA actually discourages employers from hiring older workers because the threat of an ADEA-inspired lawsuit makes it too difficult—and potentially expensive—to discharge an older worker who turns out to underperform on the job. Worse still, Posner cites statistical evidence to show that the ADEA is ineffective against age-related hiring discrimination because litigants in "failure-to-hire" cases are almost never able to establish substantial damages. In sum, the ADEA seems to protect those who least require its assistance, and not even to do a particularly good job of that.

Aging and Old Age also contains other thought-provoking discussions of old age and its surrounding issues. But alongside the serious and significant are any number of truly peculiar claims.

FOR EXAMPLE, Posner asserts that society would be better off if medical resources were diverted from treating diseases suffered by elderly women and were devoted to combating those suffered by elderly men. His reasoning is that if the latter lived longer, fewer of the former would be widowed and left without male companionship. And the cost for this reallocation of resources would be modest—only a year or two off the least happy portion of elderly women's lives.

This summary, however, does not do full justice to the flavor of Posner's arguments, which only extended quotation can adequately convey. Consider his explanation for why the elderly tend to be bad listeners. It seems they

> invest less in the creation of human capital and therefore have less to gain from receiving inputs of information from other people. And because they transact less, they have less incentive to conceal egocentrism and to engage in cooperative rather than self-aggrandizing conversation and also less to gain from concealing traits that would reduce opportunities for advantageous transactions.

Couple the sheer strangeness of such assertions with their translation into mathematical terms and the book becomes odder still. Thus, along the way to arguing that the legalization of physician-assisted suicide would not encourage more elderly people to take their own lives, Posner explains that a terminally ill patient contemplating such an act is largely engaged in calculating the value of a particular variable, "*c*":

> [H]e must choose between two courses of action: one in which he commits suicide now, at a cost (in dread of death, pain, moral compunctions, whatever) of *c*; the other in which he postpones the decision to a time when, if he still wants to commit suicide, he will be unable to do so. The question is which course will confer greater utility on him. If he commits suicide now, he will have utility of *-c*. He will experience neither positive nor expected utility from living, because he will be dead, but he will incur the cost of getting from the state of being alive to the state of being dead.

I think most readers of Posner's book will intuitively agree that there is something strange about such reasoning and the elaborate formulas that frequently accompany it.* By formalizing his assertions about human behavior as mathematical equations, Posner gives his claims the aura of objective physical laws. But a moment's thought shows this is hardly the case. The equations simply repeat the assumptions of the text and are essentially unfalsifiable. How, for example, does one go about assigning an actual value to "the cost of getting from the state of being alive to the state of being dead"?

This leads to the nagging suspicion that Posner's analysis is based on a logical error of a rather fundamental sort. The law-and-economics approach explicitly appropriates the insights of utilitarianism: people, as rational actors, seek to maximize happiness or "utility." Early exponents of law and economics shared the assumption of mainstream economists that utility itself is unmeasurable, but that wealth is a proxy for it. Now, in *Aging and Old Age*, Posner claims that the same economic laws that apply to the measurement of fi-

* For Posner, the final hedonic calculation of whether to commit suicide is embodied in the following formula of some complexity: $pc>(1-p)U_h+c$, where p and (1-p) stand for the probability that the individual will find himself in the incurably ill or healthy state and U_h (1-p) is the sum of these utilities.

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nancial well-being apply as well to utility in the original sense of happiness; having found that money can stand in for happiness, he would turn around and have this once-unmeasurable happiness stand in for money. He thus pushes the verifiable and quantifiable assumptions of economics into the unquantifiable realm of nonmarket behavior—that is, ethically driven choices about well-being, satisfaction, and happiness in matters of family, health, life, and death.

To POSNER's credit, toward the close of this book he acknowledges that the subject of old age may have proved too vast even for the techniques of law and economics. True enough. *Aging and Old Age* may succeed in deepening our understanding of some aspects of aging, particularly the legal structures that affect our rapidly graying population. But in exploring such troubling problems as euthanasia and suicide, its perversely unsentimental and dehumanized approach smacks of one of the more sinister trends of this century: the tendency to think of human beings as so many widgets and cogs.

A Fine Romance

Hannah Arendt/
Martin Heidegger
by Elzbieta Ettinger
Yale University Press. 139 pp. $18.50

Reviewed by
Robert S. Wistrich

HANNAH ARENDT's love affair with Martin Heidegger began in 1925 at the University of Marburg, shortly after her eighteenth birthday. Heidegger, a lapsed Catholic of peasant stock, married with two children, was then the rising star of German philosophy: the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927 would establish him as one of the foremost thinkers of the century.

Arendt, on the other hand, was a frail if vivacious Jewess from Koenigsberg, half Heidegger's age, and, as his student, vulnerable to his practiced seductiveness. The child of a well-off and highly assimilated family, she had been left deeply insecure by her father's gruesome death from syphilis as well as by her mother's remarriage. But she clearly inflamed Heidegger's erotic and spiritual imagination, despite or perhaps even because of his latent anti-Semitism.

The romance that followed was a passionate one, physically and emotionally. Incurring considerable risk, Heidegger carried on with it for four years, even after Arendt had transferred to another university to study with his colleague, the existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers. Eventually, however, Heidegger ended the affair, Arendt herself married, and they suspended all contact in 1933 when she left Germany and he became the pro-Nazi rector of Freiburg University.

It was not until 1950 that the two were reconciled, in Freiburg. And more than reconciled: despite Heidegger's imperious indifference to her own work and to her growing international reputation as a political philosopher, Arendt eagerly took on the task of becoming his unpaid American agent and publicist, as well as the principal defender of his compromised reputation in intellectual circles. Writing on the occasion of his eightieth birthday in 1969, she contended misleadingly that his involvement with the Nazis had been nothing more than a brief dalliance which he had corrected "more quickly and more radically than many of those who later stood in judgment over him." Thus it was that she remained under the spell of the man to whom she had confided in 1928: "And with God's will/ I will love you more after death."

ELZBIETA ETTINGER, a professor of humanities at MIT, has reconstructed this strange, tormented, and in some ways tragic love affair in a slim, elegantly written volume. Her research has been thorough, drawing heavily on hitherto inaccessible correspondence: from Arendt to Heidegger and his wife Elfriede, from Heidegger to Arendt (for legal reasons, paraphrased rather than quoted directly), and between Arendt and her second husband, Heinrich Bluecher. This material casts new light on the emotional lives of the main protagonists—much less so on their philosophy and politics—all the while telling a fascinating story.

Among the story's more troubling aspects is the extent of Arendt's submissiveness to Heidegger. Both as a student and later as a friend and equal she displayed an extraordinary readiness to put herself at his beck and call, to place him on a pedestal, and to subject herself to his arrogance. Ettinger, whose analysis eschews crude psychological reductionism, accounts for Arendt's actions in broad sociological and historical terms:

> [Arendt] shared the insecurity of many assimilated Jews who were still uncertain about their place, still harboring deep doubts about themselves. By choosing her as his beloved, Heidegger fulfilled for Hannah the dream of generations of German Jews, going back to such pioneers of assimilation as Rahel Varnhagen.

The irony here is that Arendt's own book-length study of Rahel Varnhagen, a German Jewess prominent in early-19th-century literary circles, displays keen insight into the delusions and self-

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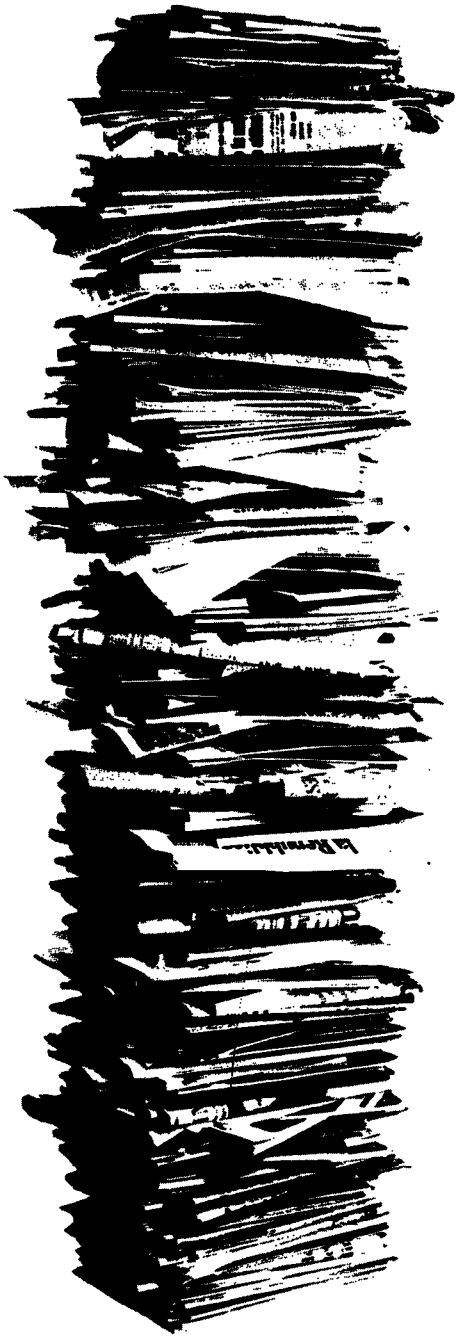

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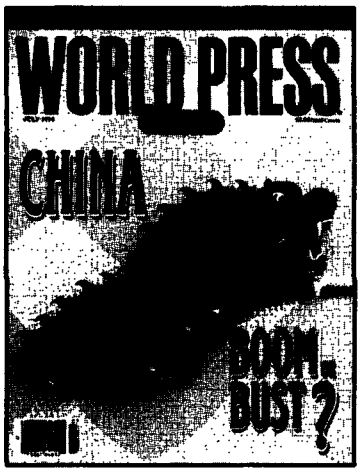

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deceptions which are entailed in the Varnhagen "model" of assimilation, but which in her relationship with Heidegger she appeared unable to resist.

To be sure, Arendt did acquire, if only for a brief while, a stronger sense of her Jewish identity. She spent part of the 1930's in France, working to transfer Jewish youth to Palestine. She felt keenly the betrayal of Jewish intellectuals by their German colleagues, at one point going so far as to describe Heidegger himself as a "potential murderer" for his appalling behavior toward his mentor, the Jewish philosopher Edmund Husserl. Most significantly, she demonstrated her understanding of the scale of the moral catastrophe which overtook Germany and Europe as a whole in her seminal work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). As Ettinger suggests, this book, which equates Nazism and Communism as political phenomena, implicitly undermined one of Heidegger's main arguments in favor of National Socialism—namely, that it would have saved Western civilization from Stalin.

Given all this, Arendt's eagerness to renew the friendship with Heidegger seems little short of baffling. In 1950 he was at his lowest ebb, banned from university teaching, without a pension, classified by the French occupation authorities as a "typical Nazi." Jaspers, whose friendship Heidegger had betrayed in the 1930's, considered him unfit to teach postwar German youth. Yet Arendt, in rhapsodies over her rapprochement with Heidegger—"a confirmation of a whole life," she called it—chose this precise moment to begin what was in effect a deliberate effort to whitewash his Nazi past. Not only did she deny any connection between his philosophy and his support for National Socialism (the standard position of all Heidegger apologists), but she claimed that he had taken unusual risks during the Nazi period. This was the very opposite of the truth; the only evidence for it was Heidegger's own testimony, which Arendt accepted without demurral.

For Heidegger, this aid was of course extremely convenient, and, in light of his reputation as an anti-Semite, doubly so since it came from a Jew. Yet his conduct toward his former student showed less gratitude than petty condescension. "For Heidegger," Ettinger writes, "it was natural to regard her labors [on his behalf] as a privilege he accorded her, for in so doing he proved that he trusted her." Nor was Arendt blind to this element, complaining in one letter that Heidegger "does not know how to conduct himself," and in another that "he finds unbearable that my name appears in public, that I write books, etc." In the end, however, there was nothing she could not forgive this living embodiment of German *Geist* and *Kultur*. The inner bond, the inner bondage, remained intact. As she wrote to Heidegger about her book *The Human Condition* (first published in 1958), it "owes to you just about everything in every regard."

THREE YEARS later, Arendt was sent by the *New Yorker* to cover the trial in Israel of Adolf Eichmann, who had been chief of operations in the Nazi plan to exterminate European Jewry. Her book on the subject, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, appeared in 1963, and it was to prove a watershed in her relations with Israel, with the American Jewish community at large, and with the community of New York intellectuals in particular. Her harsh indictment of "the role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people," which she called "undoubtedly the darkest chapter" of the Holocaust, was the cause of immense controversy, as was her characterization of Eichmann and the other Nazi perpetrators of mass murder as mere exemplars of a universal modern phenomenon that she dubbed the "banality of evil."

Eichmann in Jerusalem does not bear any direct connection to Arendt's relationship with Heidegger, and is mentioned only in passing by Ettinger. Yet the revelations in Ettinger's book do cast an oblique and rather grim light on Arendt's view both of Nazi Germany and of her fellow Jews. To put it bluntly, she seems harsher on the victims than on their Nazi persecutors.

Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger does not illuminate such questions as the place of either of its protagonists in modern philosophical and political thought. It offers something else: a startlingly intimate glimpse into some of the more somber byways of relations between Germans and Jews, and into the heart's perversities.

What the Devil

The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil

by Andrew Delbanco

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 274 pp. $23.00

Reviewed by
Christopher Caldwell

ANDREW DELBANCO, a professor of humanities at Columbia, despairs that in a century in which evil has triumphed as in no other, Americans have lost the vocabulary to respond to it. This imaginative failure, he contends, undermines our power to face evil, and may already have removed our ability to fight it. To trace historically the changing fortunes of the American idea of evil, he follows it through the early settlement, the Civil War, the Gilded Age, the

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Progressive era, and our own postwar age.

Delbanco, who has written a book on the Puritans and co-edited an anthology of their writings, begins his survey with the New England settlers, whose world view drew heavily on what the scholar Perry Miller called the "Augustinian strain of piety." Evil, for the Puritans, was represented by a Satan whose attributes—flattery, trickery, and, especially, pride—were invisible and incorporeal, a "maddeningly elusive abstraction." That elusiveness is the genius of Puritan theology, in Delbanco's view, for it constitutes an admission that evil is not something or somebody external, but exists in every one of us. To use Delbanco's modern metaphor, the Puritans viewed evil as something akin to the id.

In a religious community that was at the same time a growing commercial power, such a sensibility was doomed. For one thing, the crafty, opportunistic Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (a work which New Englanders devoured) had a lot in common with the typical businessman; as "ambition and entrepreneurship became recognized as talents and even virtues, Satan made less and less sense as a metaphor for the overweening self." Meanwhile, the rise of secular and rational habits of mind led people to look to external phenomena rather than to a loss of God's grace as the root of evil. Already by the time of the Salem witch trials, the Puritan clergyman Increase Mather could lament that, as Delbanco puts it, "the first reaction of educated people to dreams and visions [was] a determination to find some physiological—and spiritually meaningless—explanation." Satan was dead, and in his place was a variety of more worldly villains.

Delbanco is here at the edge of a very old theme: whether any meaningful morality can be constructed in the absence of religious faith. It is not a question he ever directly poses, but when his narrative arrives at the Civil War it becomes apparent that he, at any rate, views politics as the most likely candidate to replace religion as moral lodestar. Indeed, he casts that conflict as a holy war, writing that the "discovery of slavery as the devil's work was a spiritual liberation." Lincoln, in Delbanco's reading, was "the greatest Augustinian in our history": by identifying himself with the country, and taking on its sins as his own, Lincoln resuscitated in political form the old, inner-directed Puritan sense of evil.

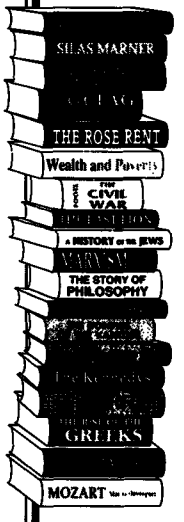
The recidivists who followed were a different story, rolling back Lincoln's moral regeneration with Robber Baron capitalism, Jim Crow, and eugenics. "Racial fear introduced a new way of thinking about evil," Delbanco asserts; in Darwin's wake, "biological transmission of character . . . could be construed as an updated version of the idea of original sin." In our own century, this defective sense of evil would lead to the greatest crimes in human history. Although those crimes did not occur on American soil, Delbanco leaves little doubt that Americans—with their stunted sense of evil and their unfounded suspicions of immigrants and "others"—bear a sizable share of the blame:

> [An American] dentistry professor [held] forth on the analogies between primitive biological entities and these new, outlandish Americans. . . . The writer, perhaps thinking of the bacterial sludge he scraped every day from his patients' teeth, regarded certain human beings as fungi hidden in the damp crannies of the body politic. . . . It would not be long before a word in another language came into use as a description of what would be left after the requisite cleaning. It was a German word, *rein*, as in *Judenrein*.

* * *

> As late as 1938 (the year, in another country, of Kristallnacht), a Harvard anthropologist published a scholarly book devoted to the classifications of deviants. . . .

The horrible thing for our own era, Delbanco thinks, is that our moral awareness has not advanced in equal measure with evil's peril—it has actually shrunk. "Evil remains an inescapable experience for all of us," he writes, "while we no longer have a symbolic language for describing it." This he blames on our "corrosive spirit of irony," hastened by the assassinations of the 1960's, which "drove an entire generation away from politics as an arena of hope." For liberals in particular, the old symbols of evil are now mere accoutrements of irony or camp, devoid of orientation. Liberal impotence has in turn left the field open to those—i.e., reactionaries—who do



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not hesitate to see evil in "the threatening other" (Delbanco takes the phrase from Garry Wills). That role was once filled by Communists, but

> now that this last devil (which Ronald Reagan confidently named the "evil empire") has disintegrated, the question is: what will come next in the Satanic succession? . . . If the privative [Augustinian] conception of evil continues to be lost between liberal irony on the one hand, and fundamentalist demonizing on the other, we shall have no way of confronting the most challenging experiences of our private and public lives.

The problems with this passage are the problems with this book. The argument is tortured, the syllogisms slippery, the prose opaque—and yet here is a moral schema just as rigid and polarized as that of the Puritans. Delbanco, in short, buys into the same moral one-dimensionality he decries, but has made things worse by politicizing them. The Puritans would surely not have considered vague notions like "the threatening other" a sufficient basis for weighing good and evil. Morality, after all, is about drawing distinctions. Some "others" do not threaten, but some do. Among threatening others, some are somewhat evil, some are quite evil, and some are ultimately evil. It may not always be easy to make such discriminations, but it would nice if a professor of humanities were capable of writing about such homegrown American ogres as Theodore Bilbo, Joseph McCarthy, and Father Coughlin without succumbing, as Delbanco does, to juxtapositions with Goebbels.

For Delbanco, evil is often merely synonymous with racism, a conveniently elastic rubric under which he lumps any manifestation of American national feeling he happens to dislike—including the use, by the wrong people, of the word "normal." Thus: "Less than a month before becoming Speaker-elect of the House of Representatives in 1994, Newt Gingrich of Georgia spoke on national television about Democrats as 'the enemies of normal people.'"

This suggests a larger problem, namely, an inability to tell the difference between morality and one's own ideology. Delbanco may be correct to contend that the Augustinian "idea of evil . . . is extremely difficult to possess in an age that has lost faith in all essences." But he is living proof that ours is not such an age. Far from having lost our sense of evil, we seem to have a feeling for it that is exquisitely overdeveloped: we can see evil in the "hostile environment" created by someone hanging a wrong poster, or enjoying a cigarette ("the evil weed") too close to a building, or even daring to use the word "normal" in public discourse. Whether an incapacity to distinguish between such annoyances and the very worst crimes humanity has ever committed fits one to write a book on evil is a devilish question.

Godfather

Neoconservatism:
The Autobiography
of an Idea
by Irving Kristol
Free Press. 493 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Wilfred M. McClay

IRVING KRISTOL is still so visible and energetic a presence in American intellectual life that it is hard to believe he has been at the job for nearly 50 years. Starting out as a junior editor at COMMENTARY in the late 40's, he went on to help found not only the late lamented *Encounter* in England but also, here at home, the *Public Interest*, which just celebrated its 30th anniversary, and the *National Interest*, which has just passed its tenth. He has never minded being referred to as the "godfather" of the neoconservative movement, and indeed, when the final balance sheet of his accomplishments is drawn up, it may well turn out that his practical leadership in that movement, and particularly his tireless and highly successful efforts at institution-building, will stand as his most enduring legacy.

Even so, the appearance of the present volume, a selection of 41 essays written between 1949 and 1995, reminds us that there is a wealth of lively and distinctive ideas behind all those practical consequences. As Kristol says again and again, ideas not only matter, they are "all-important." The right ideas can animate constructive and virtuous action and make us feel "at home" in the world; the wrong ideas can do enormous damage, distorting our institutions and estranging us from reality itself.

Most of these essays have appeared in print before, some more than once; and many of them will be familiar to readers of COMMENTARY. But the justification for gathering and reprinting them becomes clear as one reads them *seriatim*. What emerges is a remarkable consistency of viewpoint over five decades, a consistency whose full extent may surprise even some of Kristol's greatest admirers. In this sense, the term "autobiography" in the subtitle is slightly misleading, for it seems to promise an intellectual odyssey capped by a dramatic transformation. But there is no such odyssey, no such transformation—only (at most) a gradual drift of not all that many degrees. Even Kristol's legendary Trotskyist phase as a college stu-

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dent in the 30's seems, in his telling here, to have been little more than a lighthearted dabbling, whose chief effect on his life was that it enabled him to meet his future wife, Gertrude Himmelfarb.

The reflective and nuanced quality of his essays bears this out; they are calm and exploratory in tone, undogmatic, full of humanity, and without any trace of the fanaticism, bitterness, and other deformations so often associated with the "ex" mentality. If, as Kristol himself once put it, a neoconservative is a liberal who has been mugged by reality, that definition seems singularly inapplicable to the godfather himself, who, far from having been mugged, seems to have had matters pretty much in hand all along, and has largely been about the business of refining and elaborating, rather than radically revising, his views of 50 years ago.

Let me give an example of what I mean. In the past year or so, Kristol has come under heavy fire from various quarters for his warm support of religious conservatives, and for his attacks on "the sterility of secular humanism." Critics have expressed astonishment and dismay at this departure from what they conceive to be the liberal and decidedly secular founding spirit of the neoconservative movement. Yet as the essays in this book attest, Kristol, for one, has been preoccupied with questions of religious faith, and the inadequacy of the liberal and secular understanding of things, from the very beginning of his writing career.

Consider his essay "God and the Psychoanalysts," originally published in COMMENTARY in 1949, which criticizes religious leaders for their failure to respond more confidently to psychoanalysis's challenge to religion, and to understand that the truth claims of the two are mutually exclusive. If Freud asserted that religion was only a "mass obsessional neurosis," religious authorities, in Kristol's view, needed to counter that the Freudian concept of the unconscious represented "the toll paid to God and nature for the presumptive effort to have man's conscious rationality prevail over all of existing reality." As for Freud's "final and tragic message"—that the truth was "with Reason and against God," and that this was "a truth in which man probably cannot live"—suppose, Kristol wrote, "the truth is not with Freud and Reason, but with God"? That was a truth that *could* be lived in, for men would find their happiness "simply living in it, though it be a scandal to Reason."

The respectful treatment of religious orthodoxy and the misgivings about the modern secularist world view expressed in "God and the Psychoanalysts" turned out to be no youthful anomaly. Instead, they became some of the most consistent themes of Kristol's work. In an essay of 1972 on equality: "It is the death of God, not the emergence of any new social or economic trends, that haunts bourgeois society." In a 1975 examination of capitalism and conservatism: "It is the decline in religious belief over the past 50 years" that has fueled the erosion of bourgeois virtues and the rise of the adversarial intellectual. In a 1979 lecture:

> Go tell the young people that the message of the [Catholic] church is to wear sackcloth and ashes and to walk on nails to Rome, and they would do it. The church turned the wrong way. It went to modernity at the very moment when modernity was being challenged, when the secular gnostic impulse was already in the process of dissolution.

In a 1991 essay:

> There really is such a thing as secular humanism. . . . [It teaches that] the universe is bereft of transcendental meaning, it has no inherent teleology, and it is within the power of humanity to comprehend natural phenomena and to control and manipulate them so as to improve the human estate. [But that view has now begun to] collapse. . . . Secular humanism is brain dead even as its heart continues to pump energy into all of our institutions.

Kristol's religious tendencies are (to use his distinction) rabbinical rather than prophetic. In calling himself "neo-orthodox," he means to indicate that it is not the secular outlook *per se* but rather its unchallenged dominance, unchecked by orthodoxy's profound sense of moral accountability and limitation, that represents such a potent threat to our civilization. And that is the key to Kristol's approach to social and political thought in general. He is not a peddler of monisms, miracle elixirs, or master concepts. He is a meliorist, accomplished in the art of tradeoffs, who knows that in a fallen world the best is nearly always the enemy of the good, that nothing is free, and nothing is so absolutely good as to obviate the need for a countervailing check.

KRISTOL IS also, of course, a strong defender of capitalism as an incalculable force for the betterment of man's material well-being. But he is in no way an uncritical apologist for it, and he has harsh words for those who fall prey to what he regards as libertarian or economistic fallacies. Many of the essays in these pages wrestle with the pathologies and discontents inevitably generated by a successful capitalist economy, and some of the most interesting pages deal with the spiritual emptiness and "thinness" that capitalism imposes upon human relations. But in the end, his endorsement comes down on the side of the bird in hand. "Capitalism has its costs," he acknowledged in 1976, "but to hope to eliminate all of these costs while preserving all its benefits is surely a utopian fantasy." Such a qualified

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perspective differs markedly from the position taken by enthusiasts and antagonists alike.

One finds similar nuance in Kristol's treatment of democracy. He is amazed (and rightly so) that modern American historians seem unable to see democracy as a problematic ideal—that is to say, as an ideal that entails certain characteristic problems. This inability is particularly ironic in light of the Framers' own suspicion of democracy, and their efforts to check and contain the destructive tendencies of popular government. In some quarters today, the sober recognition that democracy is not inherently perfect, or at least tending in that direction, almost seems to constitute an act of treason. For Kristol, however, a high regard for democracy must not blind us to the fact that it too needs to be checked and refined by countervailing forces—and that the countervailing forces also need to be countered. Indeed, he has welcomed the current surge of populist politics and sentiment as a healthy antidote to the pernicious influence of arrogant and decadent elites.

Yet he is hardly complacent about the survival of bourgeois democratic institutions. Capitalism, liberalism, and democracy established themselves in America, he writes, upon the "low but solid" foundation of self-interest, and accepted a "weak consensus" that extends not to the definition of happiness but only to the procedural means by which governments allow individuals' varied pursuits of happiness to go forward. Such a "weak consensus" proved enormously liberating to individual creativity and aspiration, but it has been pointedly unable to offer a principle of moral cohesion upon which society can be ordered. Hence, for Kristol, the central importance of religion, and hence, too, his alarm at the prospect of our having nearly exhausted the inherited capital of our religious traditions.

IN THIS respect as in many others one senses something in these essays of the spirit of Tocqueville, another writer caught in that precarious moment when one age gives way to another, and highly attuned to the art of political problematics. Although there was much about the coming democratic order of America that was not to Tocqueville's liking, he did not attempt to rebuke or stop it. Instead, he sought to rescue it from its own excesses by strengthening the institutions that might stand as a bulwark against the tendency toward anarchic individualism, privatism, and materialism to which democracies would be prone. Principal among these institutions was that of religion.

Perhaps, then, there is another sense in which Kristol deserves the appellation of "godfather." Ever since the appearance of Mario Puzo's book of that title, there has been a tendency to think of a godfather as nothing but a power broker. But in the word's original meaning, a godfather is one who sponsors a child at baptism and thereafter is expected to take a leading role in his spiritual instruction within the community of faith. To be sure, there is something odd in crediting this "neoorthodox," nonobservant Jew with a status so closely associated with Christian practice. But Kristol may have turned out to be just the right kind of godfather for an intellectual and political movement, neoconservatism, that began its life without much regard for spiritual things.

In the process of seeking to preserve the genuine achievements of modernity, many of us, neoconservative or not, have come to acknowledge modernity's manifold failures and sicknesses—only to find that Irving Kristol has already been saying such things for a long time, and saying as well that our view of political and social life, and the moral calculus by which we shape our individual and social lives, derive from what we believe about ultimate matters. Slowly but surely, the rest of us are catching up with him.

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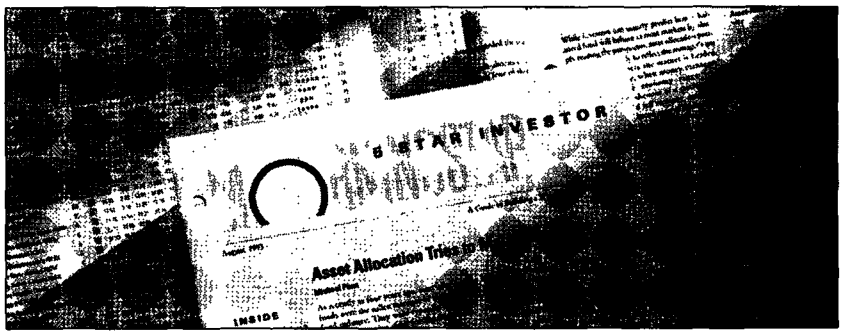

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